

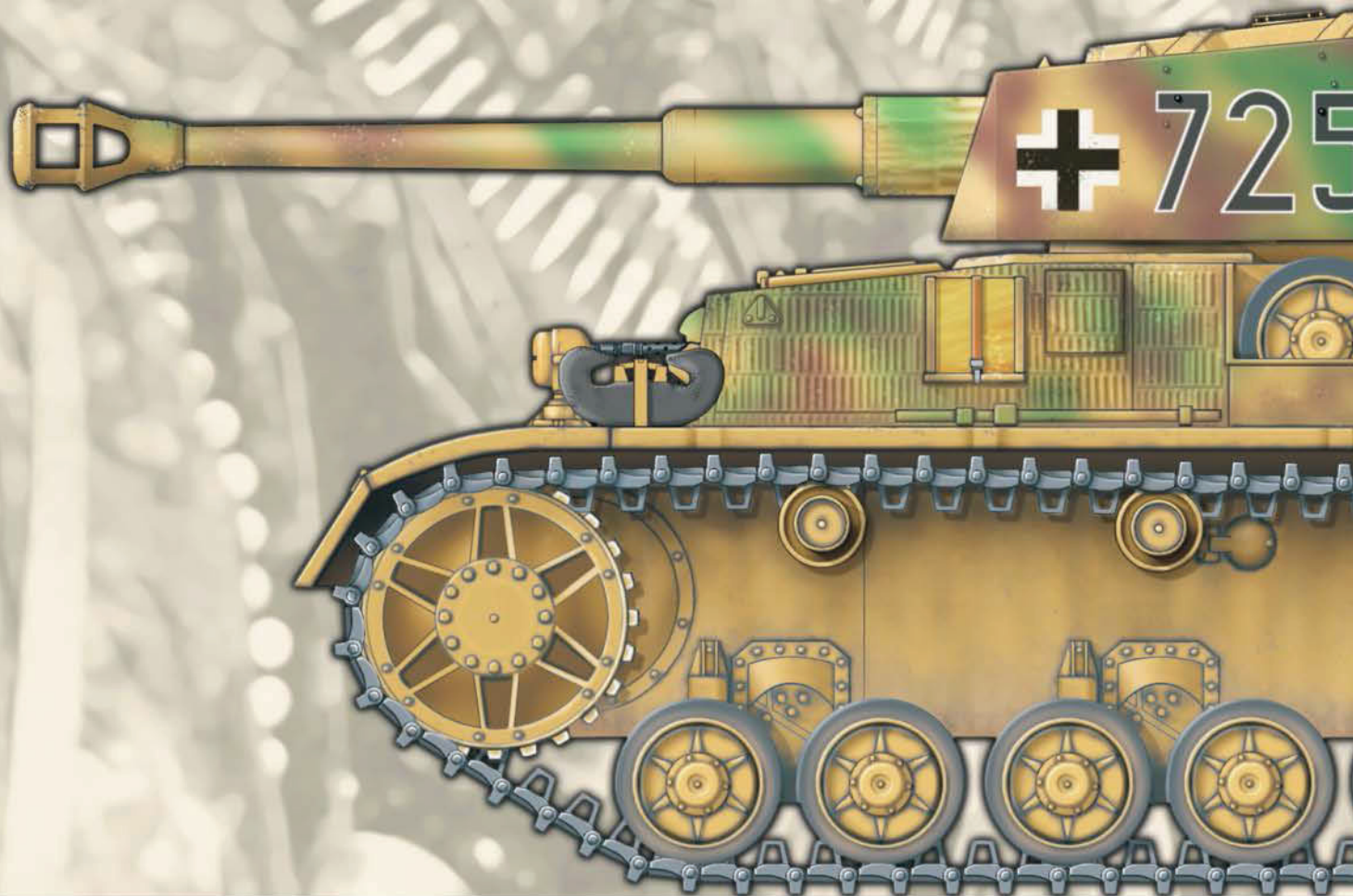


FIREFLY COLLECTION No.4

A SOUND LIKE THUNDER

MORTAIN AND FALAISE, AUGUST 1944

WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY
DENNIS OLIVER



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ISBN 978-0-9876013-1-5

Acknowledgments. The author and publisher would like to thank the staff of the National Library of Australia, Canberra, the State Library of New South Wales, Sydney, the National Archive and Records Administration, Maryland USA and Darren Neely of Fox Company Research for their invaluable assistance and advice. We would also like to thank all those who contribute to the Axis History Forum - particularly Martin Block and the late Ron Klages, the Feldgrau Forum, Panzer-Archiv.de, Die Deutsche Wehrmacht website, the Archive 1944-45 website and Mr Brett Green at Missing Lynx. We also wish to thank Mr Bernard Cher of M Workshop, Singapore and Mr Lim Kian Guan for their kind permission to reproduce the photograph of the scale model Panzer IV which appears on the back cover. Further work can be seen at www.themworkshop.com.

In addition to the websites mentioned above, the following printed works were also consulted: **The Struggle For Europe.** Wilmot, C. **Breakout. Drive To the Seine.** Mason, D. **Six Armies In Normandy.** Keegan, J. **Die 12.SS-Panzer-Division HJ.** Walther, H. **Panzers In The Bocage.** Berne, K. **Operation Cobra.** Zaloga, S. **Falaise, 1944. Death Of An Army.** Ford, K. **Invasion. They're Coming.** Carrel, P. **La Bataille Du Bocage.** Bufferaut, Y. **Panzers In Normandy Then And Now.** Lefèvre, E. **The Panzers And The Battle For Normandy.** Bernace, G. **Defenders Of Fortress Europe.** Mitcham, S. **D-Day. The Battle For Normandy.** Beevor, A. **Armor Battles Of The Waffen-SS.** Fey, W. **Victory At Mortain.** Reardon, M. **Steel Inferno.** Reynolds, M. **Die Truppenkennzeichen der Verbände und Einheiten der deutschen Wehrmacht und Waffen-SS und ihre Einsätze im Zweiten Weltkrieg 1939-1945.** Schmitz, P and Theis K-J. **Schwerer Panzerspahwagen.** Jentz, T. **Tigers In Combat I & II.** Schneider, W. **The Western Front.** Ritgen, H. **Les Panzer en Normandie.** Buffetaut, Y. **Grenadiers.** Meyer, K. **Panzers In The Gunsights.** Zaloga, S. **D-Day Tank Battles.** Balin, G. **Falaise Pocket.** Latawski, P. **Steel Rain. Waffen SS Panzer Battles In The West.** Ripley, T. **US Tank Battles In France.** Zaloga, S. **Panzerwrecks 8.** Archer, L and Auerbach, W. **Panzerwrecks 11.** Archer, L and Auerbach, W. **Panzertruppen 2.** Jentz, T. L. (Editor) **Panzer IV and its Variants.** Spielberger, W. J. **Pz.Kpfw. IV Ausf G/H/J. Vol 2.** Trojca, W. **Panzerjäger und Sturmgeschütze.** Schiebert, H. **Achtung Panzer No. 5. Sturmgeschütz III, Stug. IV & SIG.33.** Bitoh, M. (Editor). **Sturmartillerie.** Spielberger, W. J and Feist, U. **Sturmgeschütz III and IV 1942-45.** Doyle, H and Jentz, T. **Sturmgeschütz 40.** Schiebert, H. **D. Sdkfz 251.** Ledwoch, J. **Sturmgeschütz III.** Culver, B.

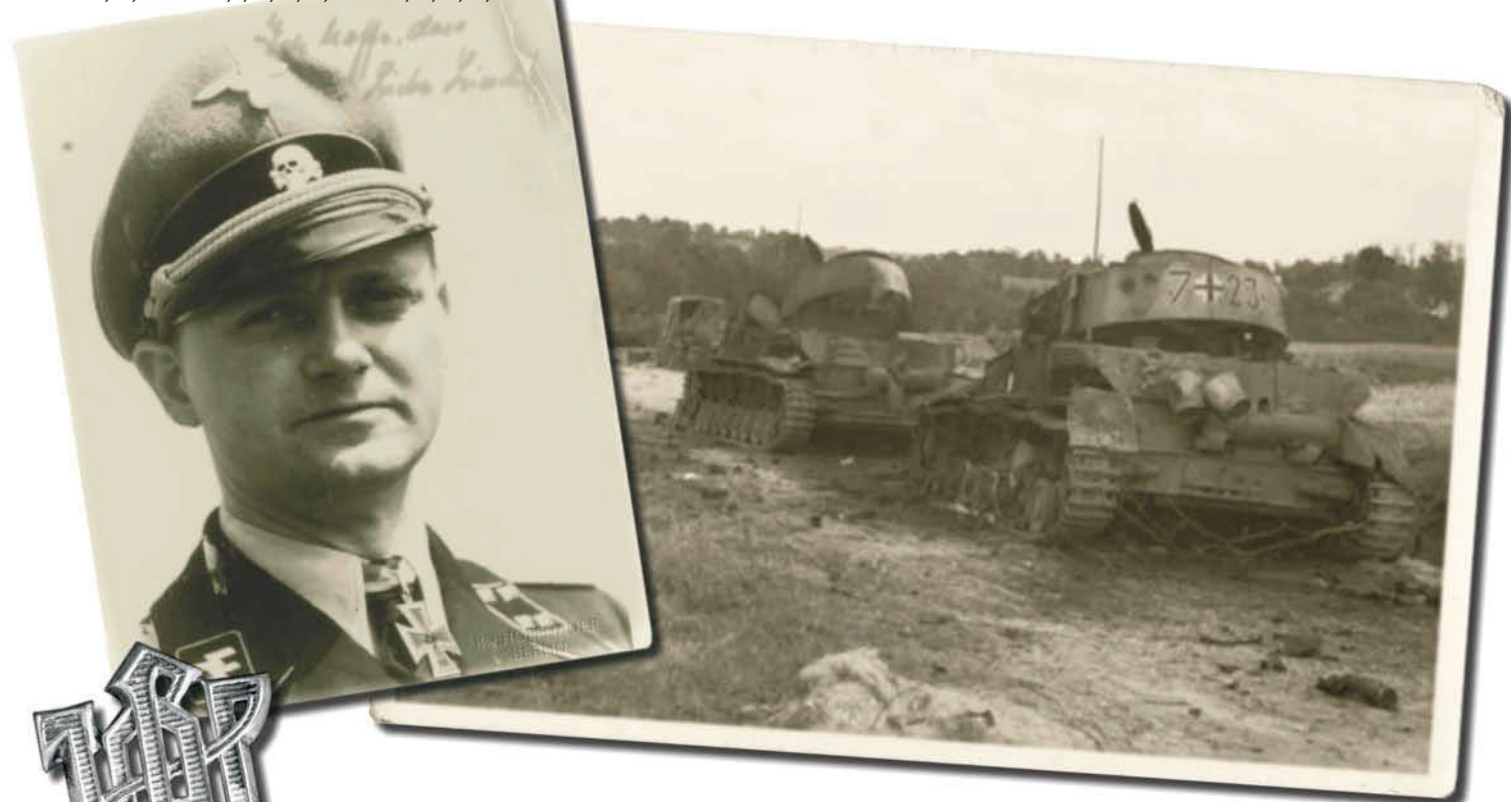
The illustrations in this book were all created using contemporary photographs as a reference and we have attempted to present as faithful a reproduction as possible - including the shape and position of any camouflage pattern, markings and the style of lettering used. In the few cases where we have been forced to speculate we have tried to make this clear. Where possible, we have reproduced the photograph or photographs so used, however copyright and budgetary restrictions and do not always allow this.

Published by ADH Publishing,
Doolittle Mill
Doolittle Lane
Totternhoe
Bedfordshire LU6 1QX
United Kingdom

Produced in co-operation with The Oliver Publishing Group

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Above left: Sturmabführer Herbert Kuhlman photographed shortly after the award of his Knight's Cross in February 1944. During the Mortain counterattack Kuhlman would command one of the two Kampfgruppen formed from elements of 1.SS-Panzer-Division. Above right: Two Pzkw IV tanks of 7.Kompanie, SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 said to have been destroyed near Mortain. Available records suggest however that only tanks from the regiment's first battalion - equipped with Panthers - were present and these vehicles may have been photographed sometime later and further east. At Left: The metal monogram worn on the shoulder straps of NCO's of 1.SS-Panzer-Division Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler. The officer's pattern were made of a gilt metal and those of enlisted men embroidered in the appropriate Waffenfarbe, or branch of service, colour.

After landing in Normandy on 6 June 1944 and establishing a bridgehead in occupied Europe with such spectacular success, the achievements of the Allied armies in the following weeks and months had fallen far short of initial expectations.

On their right flank, US Army units were tasked with overrunning the Cotentin Peninsula with its important deep water port of Cherbourg. However, the Norman countryside with its ancient patchwork of hedgerows and farms - known locally as the Bocage - offered the Germans a crucial defensive advantage and it was not until 26 June that the Cherbourg garrison surrendered after destroying the port facilities and rendering them useless. The first shipment of supplies would not be unloaded in Cherbourg before late August by which time the fighting had moved further west and the port had lost much of its strategic significance.

While the Americans were focused on Cherbourg the British and Canadians battered away at the German positions around Caen - which the Allies had expected to capture on the first day of the invasion - until late July when it was finally secured. In seven weeks of hard fighting the Allied armies had obtained little more than they had expected to secure in the first days of the campaign to liberate Europe. Indeed, the German defence had been so tenacious and conducted with such skill, that the American commander Lieutenant General Omar Bradley, in a less than optimistic appraisal of any future offensive operation, stressed the importance of maintaining momentum lest the Germans be allowed to '...get set again, we shall be right back to this hedge fighting...'.

The sector of the front allocated to the British and Canadians was far more favourable to the deployment of armoured units than the Bocage and realising this from the outset the Germans had placed the bulk of their armoured units there. The British commander General Montgomery somewhat belatedly claimed that his intention had always been to draw the German tanks onto his divisions thus freeing the Americans to exploit the advantage of facing mostly infantry formations. Whatever the veracity of Montgomery's explanation his argument that the bulk of the Panzers confronted the British and Canadians was now used by Bradley to extol the benefits of his own planned offensive.

After a false start on 24 July - which merely succeeded in alerting the Germans to the probability of a major offensive - the American attack, codenamed Operation Cobra, went ahead the following day preceded by a massive aerial bombardment. Although some bombs fell on the US positions initially causing confusion the main weight of the onslaught caught the tanks of Panzer-Lehr-Division which had been concealed in the numerous woods and sunken lanes throughout the area. The division's commander, Generalleutnant Fritz Bayerlein, later claimed that his formation and its subordinate units altogether lost over 2,000 men in the first two days of operation Cobra with fifty percent of those casualties being inflicting as a result of the bombing.

A US Army M4A1 Medium Tank passes an abandoned 8.8cm Flak 36 anti-aircraft gun during the early stages of the Operation Cobra break out in July 1944. The large prong-like device at the front of the American tank was designed to cut through the hedgerows and earthen banks that were common in the area and had done so much to hinder the Allies in the past. The German gun seems to be in relatively good condition - apart from the flat tyres - and traces of a three-colour camouflage are visible on the gun shield.

The Americans quickly broke through the German defences near Saint-Lô and almost the entire western half of the front in Normandy began to crumble. By 28 July, US commanders if the field were reporting that resistance was largely nonexistent and where the Germans were able to mount local counterattacks these were poorly organised and often half hearted. On the same day Coutances, about 40 kilometres west of Saint-Lô, was taken but attempting to push further south the Americans ran into elements of 2.SS-Panzer-Division and 17.SS-Panzergrnadier-Division and could make no further progress.

During the evening of 29 July the two Waffen-SS divisions mounted an attack of the flank of US 2nd Armoured Division near Saint-Denis-le-Gast and although initially successful, both formations were already badly depleted after fighting in Normandy for weeks and were forced to retreat, leaving most of their tanks and heavy equipment behind. By now the Germans were conducting offensive operations that were in reality escape attempts.

By 1 August, the town of Avranches at the base of the Cotentin peninsula had been taken, together with an intact bridge across the Seine at nearby Pontaubault. To support the American break out the British launched their own offensive code named Operation Bluecoat two days earlier on 30 July and much of the armored reserves that the Germans had hoped to employ against the Americans - including the powerful II.SS-Panzerkorps - were diverted to face the British.

Around Avranches the Americans continued to expand their front and although the Germans managed to hold Vire, the Americans reached Mortain and captured the town on 3 August.

Desperately attempting to scrape together enough armour for a counterattack, the German commander in the west, Feldmarschall von Kluge, begged Hitler to be allowed to withdraw to the Seine only to be told that he must attack and destroy the Allied armies.

Although undoubtedly unrealistic in hindsight, Hitler's response should have come as no surprise as an event which took place far from the Normandy battlefields, in the weeks leading up to the breakout, would have far reaching implications on future operations in France and would indeed influence the course of the war. Although often viewed as something of a historical aside, the 20 July attempt on Hitler's life confirmed in the German leader's mind the treachery he had long suspected was rampant throughout the senior ranks of the Army. In future, generals could prove their loyalty only be carrying out Hitler's orders to the letter - lack of success also being put down to treachery. Any strategic considerations, and even tactical decisions, would be the preserve of the Führer. The last major operations in the west, the Mortain counterattack and the Ardennes offensive, were both creations of Hitler in their entirety.





At left: An Sdkfz 251/7 ausf D Pionierpanzerwagen of 11.Kompanie, Panzergrenadier-Lehr-Regiment 901 said to have been photographed only hours after the US breakthrough near Saint-Lô. This vehicle is also shown and discussed on page 16 of the illustration section. Although the Panther tank in the background would seem to carry no visible markings it is almost certainly from Panzer-Lehr-Division and was in fact the subject of a further series of photographs after it had been cleared from the road. Below: A Pzkw V Panther ausf A of I.Abteilung, Panzer-Regiment 6. In the original print the beginnings of a 4.Kompanie number are visible on the turret side although almost half the Zimmerit paste is missing. Of note are what seem to be two handles welded to the glacis, presumably to allow access to the hull. Bottom: A Pzkw V Panther of 4.Kompanie, Panzer-Regiment 6 photographed at the US Army vehicle dump at Isigny-sur-Mer. The large red, outlined white numbers applied to both the turret sides and rear are clearly shown here.

In early August it was decided to withdraw what remained of Panzer-Lehr-Division with the exception of parts of the artillery regiment and a single tank company equipped with a number of Pzkw IV vehicles combined into a Kampfgruppe under Oberst von Hauser, who had been the commander of Panzergrenadier-Lehr-Regiment 901. By 9 August Hauser's battle group had been re-formed to include vehicles which had been in short term repair and were now returned from the division's workshops, the last Panther tanks of Panzer Regiment 6, remnants of Panzergrenadier-Lehr-Regiment 902, what remained of the division's reconnaissance battalion and stragglers who had managed to make their way back to their units. On 12 August Kampfgruppe von Hauser was withdrawn and a Kampfgruppe, commanded by Hauptmann Kuhnnow, consisting of a company of tanks, a howitzer battery and parts of Panzergrenadier-Lehr-Regiment 902 remained at the front and together with the survivors of 12 SS Panzer Division managed to break out of the Falaise Pocket on 20 August.



	June 1944							July 1944							August 1944								
	Pzkw III	Pzkw IV	Panther	Tiger I	StuG III	StuG IV	StuH 42	Pzkw III	Pzkw IV	Panther	Tiger I	Tiger II	StuG III	StuG IV	StuH 42	Pzkw III	Pzkw IV	Panther	Tiger I	Tiger II	StuG III	StuG IV	StuH 42
2.Panzer-Division																							
I.Abteilung, Panzer-Regiment 3			79																				
II.Abteilung, Panzer-Regiment 3		96																					
9.Panzer-Division																							
I.Abteilung, Panzer-Regiment 33																82							
II.Abteilung, Panzer-Regiment 33																	79						
Panzerjäger-Abteilung 50																					5		
11.Panzer-Division																							
Panzer-Regiment 15																26							
I.Abteilung, Panzer-Regiment 15																		79					
II.Abteilung, Panzer-Regiment 15																	89						
Panzerjäger-Abteilung 61																					8		
21.Panzer-Division																							
Panzer-Regiment 22	6**	118+							17								3^*						
116.Panzer-Division																							
Panzer-Regiment 16								13+*					6										
I.Abteilung, Panzer-Regiment 24									76														
II.Abteilung, Panzer-Regiment 16								86															
130.Panzer-Lehr-Division																							
I.Abteilung, Panzer-Regiment 6			89						8														
II.Abteilung, Panzer-Regiment 130		99						11															
3.Panzergranadier-Division																							
Panzer-Abteilung 103																2	1					37	
schwere Panzer-Abteilung 503										33	12									14			
schwere Panzerjäger-Abteilung 654									3														
Panzer-Abteilung (Funklenk) 301	2				8																		
Panzer-Abteilung (Funklenk) 302								3^					4										
Panzer-Kompanie (Funklenk) 315					10																		
Panzer-Kompanie (Funklenk) 316				3	10															5			
Sturmgeschütz-Brigade 341													33		12								
Sturmgeschütz-Brigade 394																					31		
Sturmgeschütz-Brigade 902					31										3								
326.Infanterie-Div (Pzjäg-Abt.326)													10										
331.Infanterie-Div (Pzjäg-Abt 331)																							

3

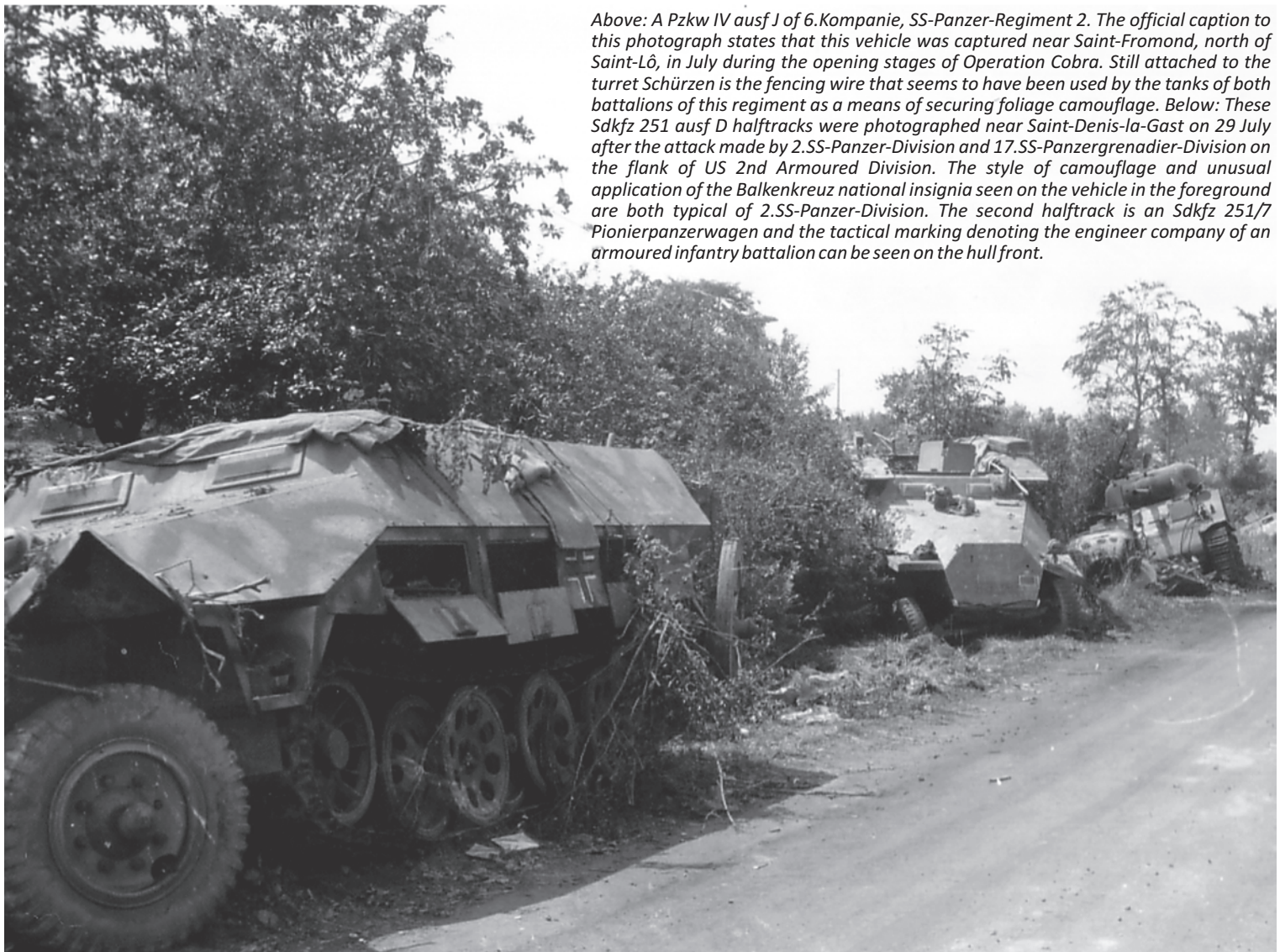


At left: A Pzkw IV ausf H of 8. Kompanie, SS-Panzer-Regiment 2 photographed at the Isigny-sur-Mer vehicle dump some time after the fighting for the Falaise Pocket. This vehicle can also be seen in the background of the large photograph on page 2. Below: Another Pzkw IV ausf H of SS-Panzer-Regiment 2, this one from 6. Kompanie. This tank was the subject of several photographs, that shown here, and a very comprehensive series said to have been taken at a vehicle dump near Trévières, west of Carentan, sometime in July 1944. This vehicle is also shown and discussed in the illustration section on Page 12. In August, two battle groups of this division under Brigadeführer Otto Baum took part in Operation Lüttich, capturing the town of Mortain and advancing further than any other German unit, withdrawing only when encirclement was imminent. The actions of the division during the fighting around Mortain are discussed further on page 8. The last few tanks of the division almost managed to overrun units of the 1st Polish Armoured Division near Mount Ormel on 20 August and in the process allow many German units to escape the Falaise Pocket. By 28 August the division's Panzer regiment had been reduced to six serviceable tanks.





Above: A Pzkw IV ausf J of 6.Kompanie, SS-Panzer-Regiment 2. The official caption to this photograph states that this vehicle was captured near Saint-Fromond, north of Saint-Lô, in July during the opening stages of Operation Cobra. Still attached to the turret Schürzen is the fencing wire that seems to have been used by the tanks of both battalions of this regiment as a means of securing foliage camouflage. Below: These Sdkfz 251 ausf D halftracks were photographed near Saint-Denis-la-Gast on 29 July after the attack made by 2.SS-Panzer-Division and 17.SS-Panzergrenadier-Division on the flank of US 2nd Armoured Division. The style of camouflage and unusual application of the Balkenkreuz national insignia seen on the vehicle in the foreground are both typical of 2.SS-Panzer-Division. The second halftrack is an Sdkfz 251/7 Pionierpanzerwagen and the tactical marking denoting the engineer company of an armoured infantry battalion can be seen on the hull front.

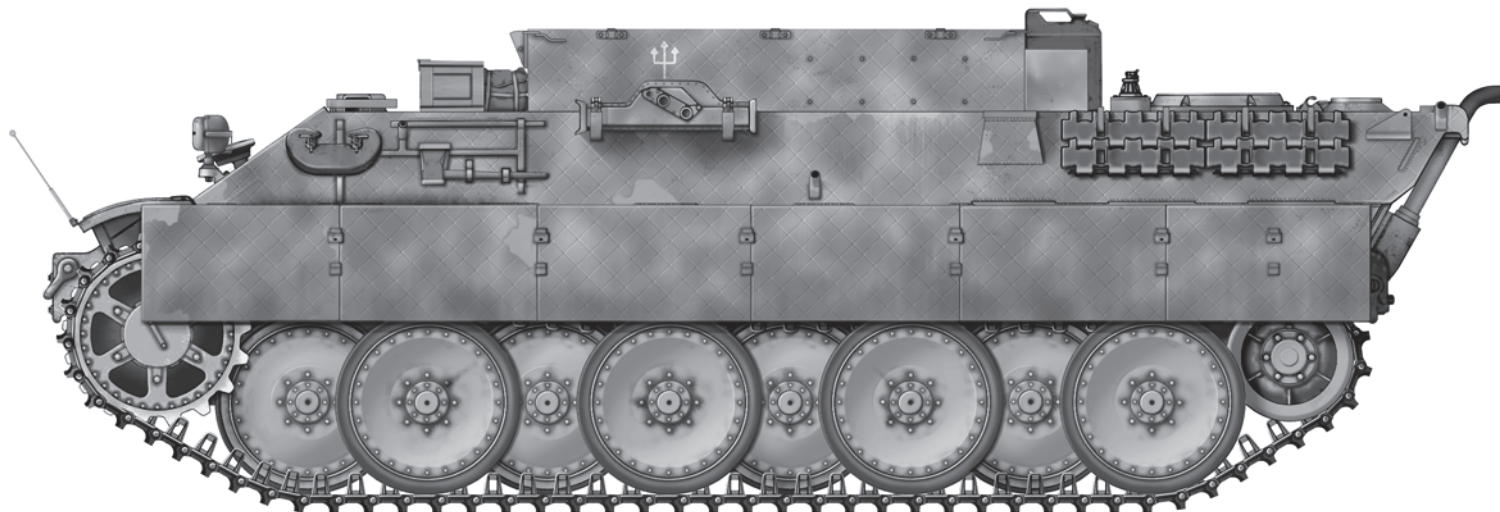


SELF-PROPELLED ARTILLERY STRENGTHS - JUNE TO AUGUST, 1944

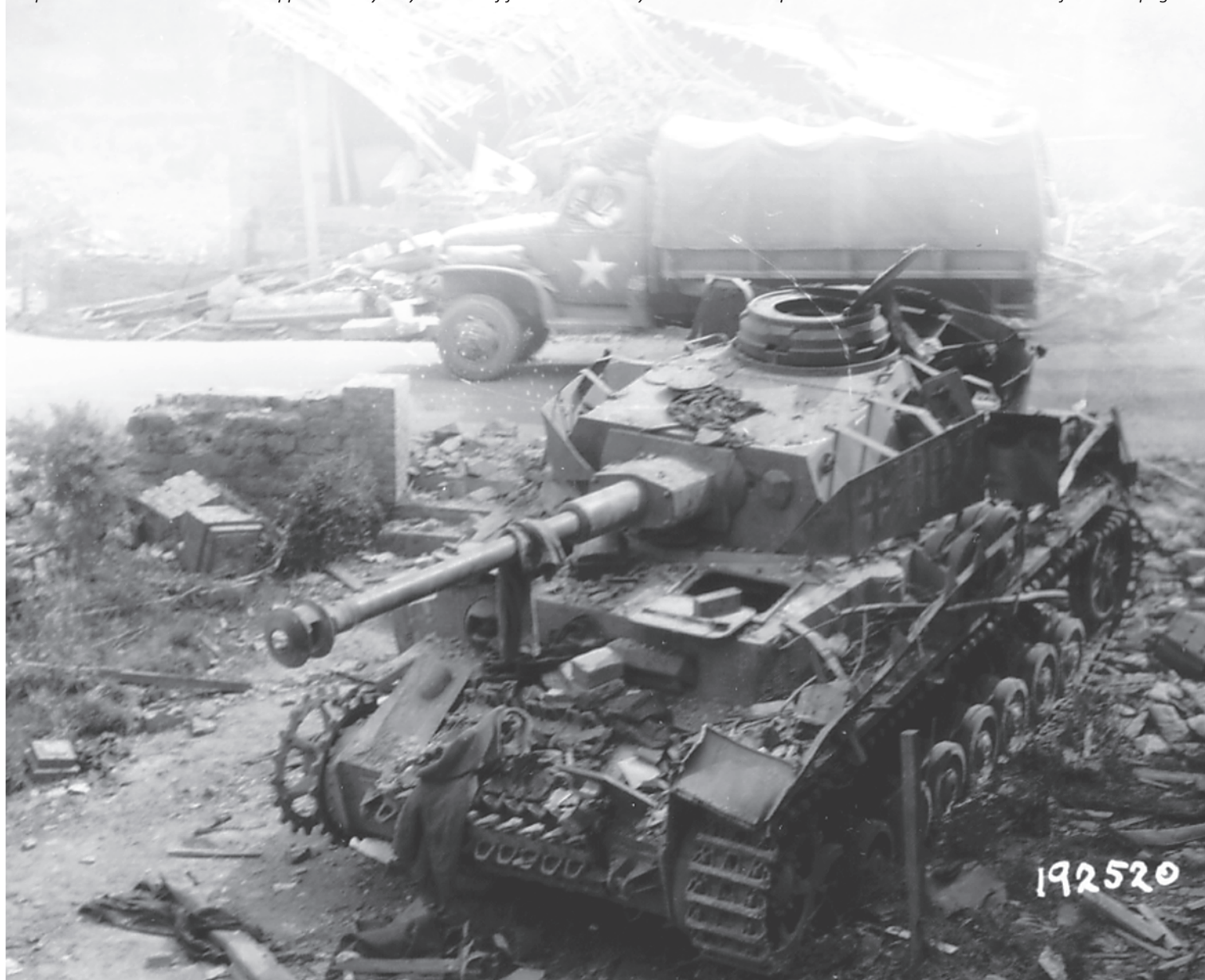
		June 1944				July 1944				August 1944			
		Wespe	Hummel	Grille	StuPz IV	Wespe	Hummel	Grille	StuPz IV	Wespe	Hummel	Grille	StuPz IV
2. Panzer-Division	Panzergrenadier-Regt 2			3									
	Panzer-Artillerie-Regt 74	12	6										
9. Panzer-Division	Panzergrenadier-Regt 10											6	
	Panzer-Artillerie-Regt 102	6									6		
11. Panzer-Division	Panzergrenadier-Regt 110											3	
	Panzergrenadier-Regt 111											3	
116. Panzer-Division	Panzer-Artillerie-Regt 119									12	6		
	Panzergrenadier-Regt 60							6					
	Panzergrenadier-Regt 156							6					
	Panzer-Artillerie-Regt 146					12	6						
130. Panzer-Lehr-Division	Panzergrenadier-Regt 901			6									
	Panzergrenadier-Regt 902			6									
3. Panzergrenadier-Division	Panzergrenadier-Regt 29											6	
Sturm-Panzer-Abteilung 217													14
1. SS-Panzer-Division	SS-Panzergrenadier-Regt 1							1					
	SS-Panzer-Artillerie-Regt 1					8	5						
2. SS-Panzer-Division	SS-Panzergrenadier-Regt 4							1					
	SS-Panzer-Artillerie-Regt 2					6	5						
9. SS-Panzer-Division	SS-Panzergrenadier-Regt 19			6									
	SS-Panzergrenadier-Regt 20			6									
	SS-Panzer-Artillerie-Regt 9	12	6										
10. SS-Panzer-Division	SS-Panzer-Artillerie-Regt 10	11	6										
12. SS-Panzer-Division	SS-Panzer-Artillerie-Regt 12	12	6										
17. SS-Panzergrenadier-Division	SS-Panzergrenadier-Regt 37			6									
	SS-Panzergrenadier-Regt 38			6									

Photographed at the crossroads north of Faligny known as Le Repas, a column of US troops passes a disabled LKW Opel Blitz. Just visible on the driver's side fender is the unit insignia of 10. SS-Panzer-Division Frundsberg, another example of which can be seen on page 19. This photograph was taken looking north along what is today Route-de-la-Libération and as with many towns in northern France, little has changed since 1944. Although the roads are now paved, all the buildings visible here are still standing.





Above: A Bergepanther ausf A of 2. Panzer-Division captured in late August 1944 after the fighting for the Falaise Pocket. The exact location of our photograph is unfortunately unknown but the presence of a number of Canadian soldiers throughout the whole series would suggest that it was taken somewhere on the northern edge of the escape corridor. Of note is the division's unit insignia, applied in white, clearly visible on the raised superstructure side and the application of the Zimmerit anti-magnetic mine paste in a series of diagonal lines. Below: A Pzkw IV ausf J of 8. Kompanie, Panzer-Regiment 3 of 2. Panzer-Division photographed in Pont-Farcy south of Saint-Lô in early August. In the original print the division's Trident unit insignia, although faint, is visible on the hull front to the right of the driver's visor and the vehicle's number 802 can be seen behind the Balkenkreuz on the turret Schürzen. This vehicle is also shown and discussed in the illustration section on page 18. This division was one of the strongest German armoured units available to Oberbefehlshaber West when the invasion began, being almost at full strength with seventy-nine Panther and ninety-six Pzkw IV tanks. For most of June the division operated against the British and Canadians in the Caumont area, south west of Rouen. On 26 June, with the launch of Operation Epsom, the serviceable Panther tanks of I. Abteilung were detached to act independently and in a single day - Wednesday, 28 June - the battalion was credited with the destruction of fifty-three enemy tanks and fifteen anti-tank guns. On 21 July the division was slowly withdrawn from the front and gradually replaced by 326. Infanterie Division, although I. Abteilung of Panzer-Regiment 3 probably remained behind. Badly worn down, the battalion reported that just thirteen tanks were ready for operations, although another twenty-six would be available after minor repairs could be completed. During the first weeks of August, the division took part in Operation Lüttich, the counterattack on US positions around Mortain with approximately sixty tanks and fifteen tank-destroyers. The division's part in the counterattack is discussed further on page 8.





COUNTERATTACK AT MORTAIN

Above: The town of Mortain and the surrounding area as it appeared in 1944. Right: A Pzkw V Panther photographed near Mortain in August 1944. Although it is not possible to identify the unit to which this vehicle belongs with any certainty, there were several wrecks from SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 nearby which formed part of the same collection of images. The absence of the characteristic hooks seen on the turrets of almost all the Leibstandarte Panthers suggests that this vehicle may have been one of the tanks of 2. Panzer-Division which was in the same area.



By Wednesday 2 August 1944, the US Army divisions that had broken through the German defences in Normandy between Saint Lô and Périer as part of Operation Cobra had advanced to Avranches in the south and were threatening the important crossroads town of Vire more than 40 kilometres from their starting point. Around Caen the British had launched an attack in support of Cobra on the previous Sunday, tying down the German armoured reserves that would have been used to blunt the American offensive. By 3 August, US troops had captured the bridge across the River Seine at Pontaubault, about 5 kilometres south of Avranches, and it seemed at last that the stalemate that had prevailed since the Allies had landed in Normandy was over(1).

On that same Wednesday, from his home in Berchtesgaden, Hitler - in what appears to have been a spur of the moment decision - ordered Generalfeldmarschall Günther von Kluge, since 5 July Oberbefehlshaber West, to launch an immediate counterattack towards Avranches and the coast(2).

Hitler promised Kluge the reinforcements that he would need for the counterattack while confiding to his staff that success would only follow if enough armour could be detached from what he termed the main - that is British - front, if complete surprise were achieved and if Kluge had faith in the plan. The last condition a rather transparent device providing a scapegoat for the counterattack's possible failure before it was even launched. The deputy to the chief of staff of OKW, General Walter Warlimont who had earlier been at Kluge's headquarters relaying Hitler's orders that the defence must hold, was convinced that the Führer had made, once more, a 'snap decision'.

Viewed from Hitler's perspective however the plan had every chance of success. The identification of Patton's 3rd Army, which Hitler had long feared would be used in a secondary invasion, released the German divisions that had been stationed north of the Seine. Further, the length of the American supply lines through Avranches seemed to present an ideal opportunity of delivering a severe setback to the Allies if attacked vigorously and, in addition, the failure of the British attempt to break out of their bridgehead around Caen meant that the armoured units there could be released for use elsewhere. In reality the formations on the east bank of the Seine were all infantry units and had been slowly drained of men and material to reinforce the divisions fighting in Normandy, the armoured units facing the British had been bled

white in almost two months of continual combat and any attempt to attack towards Avranches would have to be undertaken through the same Bocage countryside that had done so much to sustain the German defence. To all this the necessity to operate completely without air cover, despite Hitler's promises to the contrary, needs to be added. A further disadvantage, completely unknown of course to the Germans, was the forewarning enjoyed by the Allied commanders through the Ultra code-breaking operation.

Buoyed by the news of reinforcements and perhaps inspired by the operation's codename of Lüttich(3), Kluge - with new found enthusiasm or maybe an acceptance of the inevitable - now emphasised that the attack go ahead without delay.

Hitler however insisted that Kluge and his subordinate, Obergruppenführer Paul Hausser the commander of 7. Armee, wait until at least 8 August when all the available units could be assembled, even at the risk of the situation deteriorating further. Dismayed, both Kluge and Hausser wanted any assault to begin immediately, pleading that any slow build up would attract the attention of the Allied air forces. Uncharacteristically, Hitler gave way and agreed that the attack should commence at 10.00pm on Sunday, 6 August.

The attack force may have looked formidable on paper and many histories accept that small, isolated American units were able to hold off up to four elite German armoured divisions, two infantry divisions and a number of Kampfgruppen or battle groups until reinforcements came to the rescue. In the normal course of events this would have meant that Kluge would have had at his disposal tens of thousands of men and hundreds of armoured vehicles. Indeed, Hitler had promised him that eight of the nine armoured divisions then in France would be made available to him for the attack. However, by the afternoon of 6 August elements of just three Panzer divisions and one Panzergrenadier division had made their way to the Mortain area with parts of a further division - 1. SS-Panzer-Division - struggling to reach their assembly points.

The truth is that the German divisions available were so depleted that at best they were little more than strong brigades. As this is so often ignored an examination of the composition of the German units present may be helpful. It should be noted that the lists given here may not be complete but have been compiled from the best available information and any units not mentioned were in all likelihood not combat formations.

2. Panzer-Division

For most of June this division was engaged against the British forces in the area south-west of Rouen and on 26 June, with the launch of Operation Epsom, I.Abteilung of Panzer-Regiment 3 was detached to act independently. In a single day - Wednesday, 28 June - the Panthers of I.Abteilung were credited with the destruction of over fifty enemy tanks. On 21 July the division began a gradual withdrawal from the front and was replaced by 326.Infanterie-Division. It is almost certain that the Panther battalion - with only thirteen operational tanks - remained behind and did not take part in the fighting around Mortain. For Operation Lüttich the division's available assets were concentrated in Kampfgruppe Schacke led by Oberst Hans Schacke, commanding officer of the division's Panzergrenadier-Regiment 304. This battle group contained the first battalion of Schacke's regiment together with Panzerjäger-Abteilung 38 - equipped with fifteen serviceable Jagdpanzer IV tank destroyers - and I.Abteilung, Panzer-Regiment 24, which had been detached from 116.Panzer-Division and had perhaps sixty combat-ready Pzkw V Panther tanks on hand. This battle group also contained elements of II.Abteilung, Panzer-Regiment 3 - equipped with a number of Pzkw IV tanks - and Panzergrenadier-Regiment 2. In addition, both the battle groups made up of troops from 1.SS-Panzer-Division would come under Schacke's command. Some personnel of the divisional staff were present, including General Heinrich Freiherr von Lüttwitz the division's commander, however they did little more than monitor Schacke's progress.

116. Panzer-Division

This division, commanded by General Gerhard Graf von Schwerin, had been in reserve south-east of Caen when the Americans broke through near Saint Lô on 28 July. This formation was one of Kluge's strongest assets for the coming counterattack and although some of its constituent units had still not arrived in Normandy by the end of July, Schwerin was able to field I.Abteilung, Panzer-Regiment 16, Panzerjäger-Abteilung 228, Panzer-Aufklärungs-Abteilung 16 and two Panzergrenadier regiments together with various support units. The Panthers of I.Abteilung, Panzer-Regiment 24 had been attached to the division in June but this battalion was now to be given up to the battle group of 2. Panzer-Division.

1.SS-Panzer-Division-Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler

The premier division of the Waffen-SS and an elite fighting unit this formation was however drastically under strength from the start of the Normandy campaign with approximately half its authorised allocation of tanks being on hand throughout June and July. The division had been fighting alongside 12.SS-Panzer-Division - together forming I.SS-Panzerkorps - south of Caen until the evening of 4 August when two battle groups were detached to support 2. Panzer Division in the Mortain counterattack. The first of these, Kampfgruppe Kuhlmann, was commanded by Sturmbannführer Herbert Kuhlmann and comprised I.Abteilung, SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 and III.Abteilung, SS-Panzergrenadier-Regiment 2. The second was Kampfgruppe Knittel commanded by Sturmbannführer Gustav Knittel and was made up of SS-Panzer-Aufklärungs-Abteilung 1. The first and second battalions of SS-Panzergrenadier-Regiment 2 arrived later in the battle.

2.SS-Panzer-Division Das Reich

This division had been stationed in southern France when the Allied landings took place in Normandy after being reduced to a state of almost complete exhaustion by continuous combat in Russia. As late as the end of June many units, including at least two tank companies, were only then leaving southern France for the invasion front and for the Mortain attack just five Pzkw IV and three Panther tanks with eight Sturmgeschütz III assault guns were ready for immediate deployment. For Operation Lüttich the available units of this division were organised into two battle groups. The first, Kampfgruppe Deutschland was based around SS-Panzergrenadier-Regiment 3 Deutschland supported by SS-Panzer-Aufklärungs-Abteilung 2 and parts of SS-Panzer-Regiment 2. The second group, Kampfgruppe Der Führer, comprised SS-Panzergrenadier-Regiment 4 Der Führer and SS Sturmgeschütz-Abteilung 2, the latter presumably equipped with the eight assault guns mentioned above.

17.SS-Panzergrenadier-Division Götz von Berlichingen

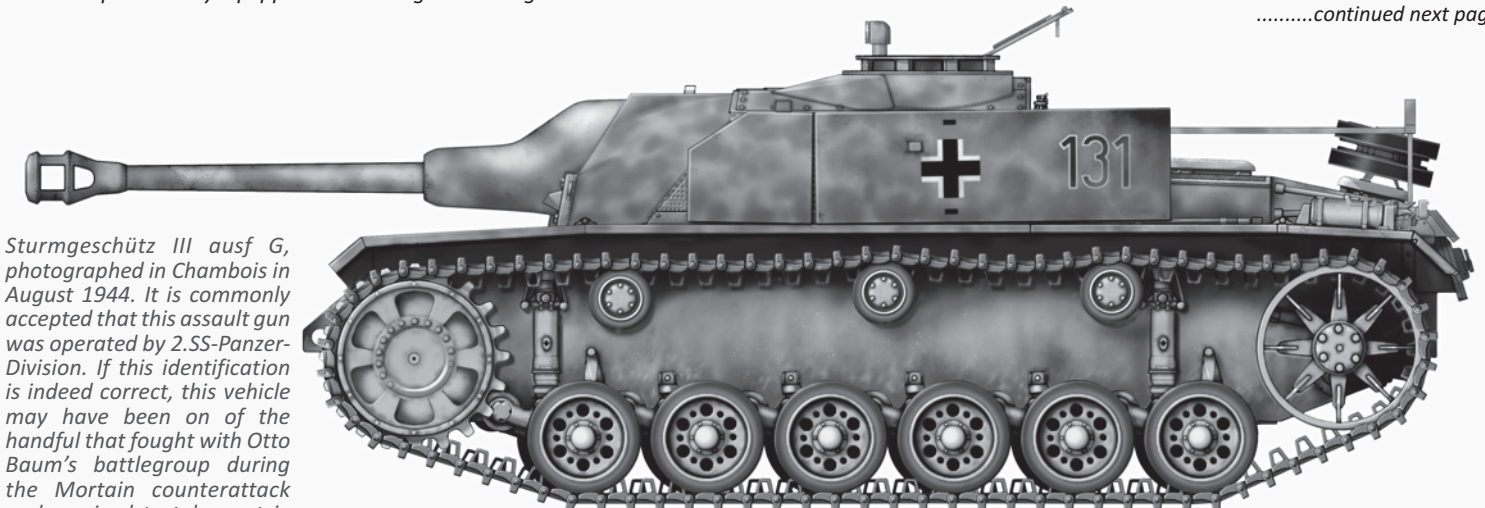
In late July, as a result of the American breakthrough at Saint Lô, the division found itself surrounded at Coutances and only managed to break out after losing most of its equipment. The survivors were organised into ad hoc, poorly equipped battle groups and subordinated to 2.SS-Panzer-Division for the Mortain counterattack. The first of these was led by Hauptsturmführer Karl Ulrich, commander of II.Abteilung, SS-Panzergrenadier-Regiment 37, and referred to as Kampfgruppe Ulrich. This group contained a single Panzergrenadier battalion - probably Ulrich's - supported by a tank platoon equipped with a number of Pzkw IV vehicles detached from SS-Panzer-Regiment 2. The latter may have had been all five of the tanks that the regiment had available at that time. The second group, Kampfgruppe Fick, was commanded by Obersturmbannführer Jakob Fick and was made up of the staff element and the thirteenth and fourteenth companies of SS-Panzergrenadier-Regiment 37, a small number of men from SS-Panzergrenadier-Regiment 38 supported by elements of Fallschirmjäger-Regiment 14 of 5.Fallschirmjäger-Division and an infantry gun platoon. Although at least one source states that a company from SS-Panzerjäger-Abteilung 2 armed with Sturmgeschütz III assault guns was attached for the attack, this seems unlikely as 2.SS-Panzer-Division, the battalion's parent formation, had only eight assault guns available. It should also be stressed that Kampfgruppe Fick, although diverse, contained just over three hundred personnel. An artillery element, Artillerie-Gruppe Ernst, contained parts of I.Abteilung, SS-Artillerie-Regiment 17 together with the seventh and eighth batteries of the regiment and also the staff of III.Abteilung. None of the artillery pieces were self-propelled.

According to US Army intelligence sources several infantry formations were also identified in the area however, most of these divisions had also been reduced to battle groups and their function would be to guard the flanks of the counterattack. The operation would be co-ordinated by XXXVII.Panzerkorps commanded by General Hans Freiherr von Funk, an experienced tank officer who had succeeded Rommel as commander of 7.Panzer-Division and had led a corps on the Russian Front.

The attack was scheduled to begin at 10.00pm on Sunday, 6 August, however as mentioned above two of the strongest formations, the Kampfgruppen made up of troops from 1.SS-Panzer-Division, were still moving forward from the positions they had occupied around Falaise the previous day, over 60 kilometres to the north-east. It should be remembered that in addition to the difficulty of disengaging from the enemy around Caen and proceeding towards their starting points along the already congested Norman roads, all movement had to be undertaken during the short summer nights(4).

During the afternoon of 6 August, the XXXVII.Panzerkorps commander called Hausser at 7.Armee headquarters to request that the attack be delayed for at least a day but Hausser, considering Hitler's personal involvement in the plan, would only agree to a postponement of two hours. Disappointed, Funk then demanded that Hausser relieve Schwerin, the commander of 116.Panzer-Division, who Funk claimed - incorrectly - had earlier that day refused to release I.Abteilung, Panzer-Regiment 24 to the 2. Panzer-Division battle group. Using the argument that it was far too late in the day to be changing divisional commanders, Hausser probably knew of the intense animosity that existed between the two aristocratic officers and chose to ignore Schwerin's actions on this occasion. Further, it was common knowledge among senior commanders that Hitler himself held a long standing grudge against Funk and now, less than four hours before the offensive was due to begin, demanded that Kluge replace him with General Heinrich Eberbach, the commander of 5.Panzerarmee. Appalled, Kluge contacted OKW headquarters in East Prussia only to be advised that the operation should perhaps be delayed. Arguing once again that a delay of a single day would expose his units to attack from the air, Kluge secured a postponement of the change of command and now turned his attention to the problem of the missing Kampfgruppen of 1.SS-Panzer-Division.

.....continued next page



Sturmgeschütz III auf G, photographed in Chambois in August 1944. It is commonly accepted that this assault gun was operated by 2.SS-Panzer-Division. If this identification is indeed correct, this vehicle may have been on of the handful that fought with Otto Baum's battlegroup during the Mortain counterattack and survived to take part in the fighting near Falaise.

Late in the evening a dense fog descended on the area and the German commanders were hopeful that the weather conditions would prevail throughout the next day, shielding their tanks from the Allied fighter-bombers. In complete darkness the units from the Leibstandarte division began arriving at their designated assembly areas and soon afterwards, just past midnight, the attack went forward.

According to the German plan the units of 2.Panzer-Division in the centre were to drive forward along the south bank of the River See while their left flank would be guarded by the two battle groups from 2.SS-Panzer-Division which would attack on both sides of the town of Mortain. The Kampfgruppen of 1.SS-Panzer-Division would exploit the expected success of the Mortain attack and head for Avranches. On the right, 116.Panzer-Division would advance along the north bank of the See in the direction of Chérencé-le-Roussel. To maximize the potential for surprise, the attack would dispense with any preparatory artillery bombardment.

Just after midnight on the morning of 7 August, the two battle groups of 2.SS-Panzer-Division, led by Brigadeführer Otto Baum, pushed ahead to Mortain and in total darkness took the town by storm, capturing intact a battalion headquarters of the US 120th Infantry Regiment which had been housed in the Hôtel de la Croix-Blanche.

In spite of their spectacular success Baum's men had been unable to capture Hill 317, an area of high ground to the east of the town at the edge of the Forêt de Mortain, now held by a single battalion of the 120th Infantry which had retreated there after the town was taken. As the Americans on Hill 317 directly overlooked Baum's supply route - and indeed almost everything for miles around - they would be able to call down artillery fire onto any Germans they observed and later, as the fog began to lift, this is exactly what they did.

Realising that he must keep moving towards the west if the operation was to have any chance of success, Baum urged his men on and leaving the units of 17.SS-Panzergrenadier-Division under his command to deal with Hill 317, raced down the Mortain - Saint-Hilaire-du-Harcouët road securing the high ground north of Milly and threatening the town of Saint-Hilaire. The small garrison on Hill 317 defended their position stubbornly and despite determined attacks by the Grenadiers of the Götz von Berlichingen division they managed to hold on, proving to be a thorn in the side of the German offensive - if only a small one.

Further to the north the battle groups of 2.Panzer-Division were experiencing their own difficulties. The plan called for an advance in two columns that would push halfway to Avranches - their ultimate objective - by nightfall of the first day. At midnight the left hand column had still not formed up and would not commence its attack until 2.00pm. The right hand column however had thrust deep into the American lines encountering little opposition until it ran head on into a minefield where the lead tank and a headquarters vehicle were destroyed killing Major Hans Schneider-Kostalski, the commander of Panzer-Regiment 3, who had been co-ordinating the advance. The minefield was quickly cleared and the advance continued to le-Mesnil-Adelée, over 10 kilometres to the north-west of Mortain, brushing aside the US 119th Infantry Regiment and entering the village as the sun was rising.

By this time the left hand column - although starting late - had been moving forward for some time and cloaked by the thick fog, captured the village of Bellefontaine with little effort.

It was now 5.00am and the right hand column of 2.Panzer-Division turned their attention on Saint-Barthélemy which was held by the US 117th Infantry Regiment and the 823rd Tank Destroyer Battalion, the latter armed with 3inch anti-tank guns. These guns came as an unpleasant surprise to the Germans who lost a number of tanks(5) before the town was eventually taken. Following an intense artillery barrage the German tanks rolled forward at 5.45am capturing the town after a brief fight but failing to move much further west, running into the lead elements of US 3rd Armored Division which was being hurriedly moved into position to halt the German advance.

Shortly after the capture of Saint-Barthélemy the thick curtain of fog had started to lift and many of the German units, anticipating the inevitable Allied air-strikes and finding the resistance on the ground to be much more robust than they had expected, had taken up defensive positions.

At first the Americans assumed that the German offensive was nothing more than a number of uncoordinated local attacks until insistent radio reports of strong armoured penetrations convinced the US 1st Army commander that a serious threat was developing. The most worrying aspect was Otto Baum's advance towards Saint-Hilaire which was co-incidentally the junction of the US 1st and 3rd Armies. A strong combined arms force from the US 3rd Armored Division was ordered into the area and by noon elements of 2nd Armored Division would also move to head off the Germans.

As early as 8.30am the first American fighter-bombers had taken off and headed towards Mortain and before midday the skies were swarming with Allied aircraft. Hitler had promised Kluge that the Luftwaffe would provide almost one thousand aeroplanes to support his offensive but in the event barely three hundred had been available and not one German fighter reached the Mortain area. Although the British and US fighter-bombers ranged across the battlefield for three hours the claims of over one hundred German tanks

destroyed were wildly exaggerated and the true number may have been less than ten. Indeed, it is almost certain that the American artillery caused far greater damage and probably accounted for the majority of the German casualties as well as material losses. Nevertheless, the threat posed by the Jabos(6) was almost as effective as their guns and rockets and some tank crews simply left their vehicles rather than risk making them their coffins.

From his advance headquarters at Alençon, some 60 kilometres to the east, Kluge had followed the initial success of his offensive and now watched as the counterattack devolved into a series of small unit actions with the German formations struggling to hold the ground they had taken.

In mid-afternoon Kluge received a message from Hitler's headquarters urging that the attack be resumed as soon as possible employing "...the greatest daring, determination and imagination". Seemingly undeterred Kluge passed the order to Funk at XXXXVII.Panzerkorps headquarters who began preparations at once for another attack.

At about the same time, Funk realised that the tanks of 116.Panzer-Division, positioned to the north of Mortain, had yet to begin their attack. To compound his alleged insubordination of the previous day Schwerin had refused to order his men forward, later claiming that the unit sent to relieve his division, the badly depleted 84.Infanterie-Division, would be unable to hold the line against a determined American attack. There may have been some truth in this as Schwerin had indeed raised the matter with Funk on the previous day only to be accused of cowardice and although his real motives will probably never be known his involvement in the 20 July Plot is often put forward as a factor. Seeing his chance to discredit his enemy, Funk immediately contacted Hausser at 7.Armee headquarters and demanded that Schwerin be relieved of his command. This time Hausser did not hesitate and at 2.00pm he replaced Schwerin with Oberst Walter Reinhard, Funk's chief of staff(7).

The Mortain counterattack had cost XXXXVII.Panzerkorps the better part of its armoured strength and although sporadic fighting continued throughout the next day and Funk prepared for another assault, events elsewhere overtook him and the follow up attack would never take place. To the south General Adolf-Friedrich Kuntzen's LXXXI.Armeekorps could not stop the US 3rd Army and many of his units were fed piece by piece into the battle including the precious tanks of 9.Panzer-Division which had originally been promised to Kluge. In the north the British 21st Army Group had launched a major assault during the evening of 7 August, only hours after Hitler had ordered Kluge to prepare another attack toward Avranches. There would be no further offensive operations at Mortain - the next act of the drama would be played out around Falaise.

Notes

(1) The US official history, and most other accounts, give 1 August as the day that the Pontaubault bridge was captured however the US 12th Army Group situation map for 2 August shows the US positions as a few kilometres north of the river.

(2) The overall commander of German forces on the Western Front. Replacing Generalfeldmarschall von Rundstedt as OB West, who had fallen foul of Hitler by suggesting a withdrawal to the Seine, Kluge was also given command of Heeresgruppe B after Rommel was wounded on 17 July.

(3) In German, the Belgian city of Liège is referred to as Lüttich. In August 1914 the city, which had been considered one of the strongest fortresses in Europe, was captured by a small infantry force under the command of Eric Ludendorff, until then an unknown brigade commander. At the time Kluge was a young captain on the staff of XXI.Armeekorps.

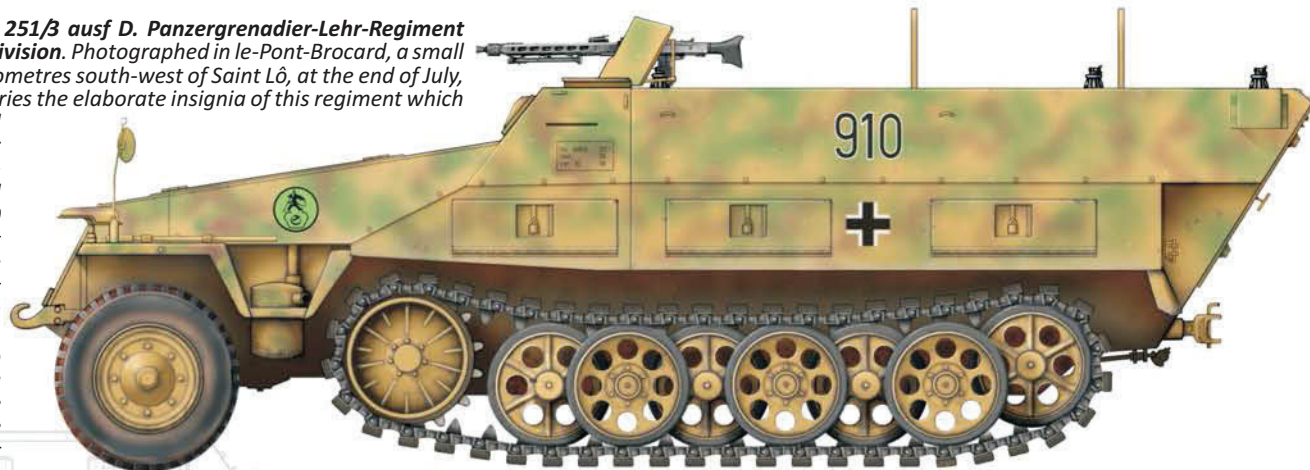
(4) In several German accounts it is mentioned that the Leibstandarte's progress was also hindered by many instances of pure bad luck including one episode where the lead elements managed to down an Allied fighter only to have it crash onto the lead tank, blocking the road and holding the column up for hours.

(5) US sources claim that forty German tanks were destroyed in front of Saint-Barthélemy while the Germans claim to have lost just fourteen Panzers.

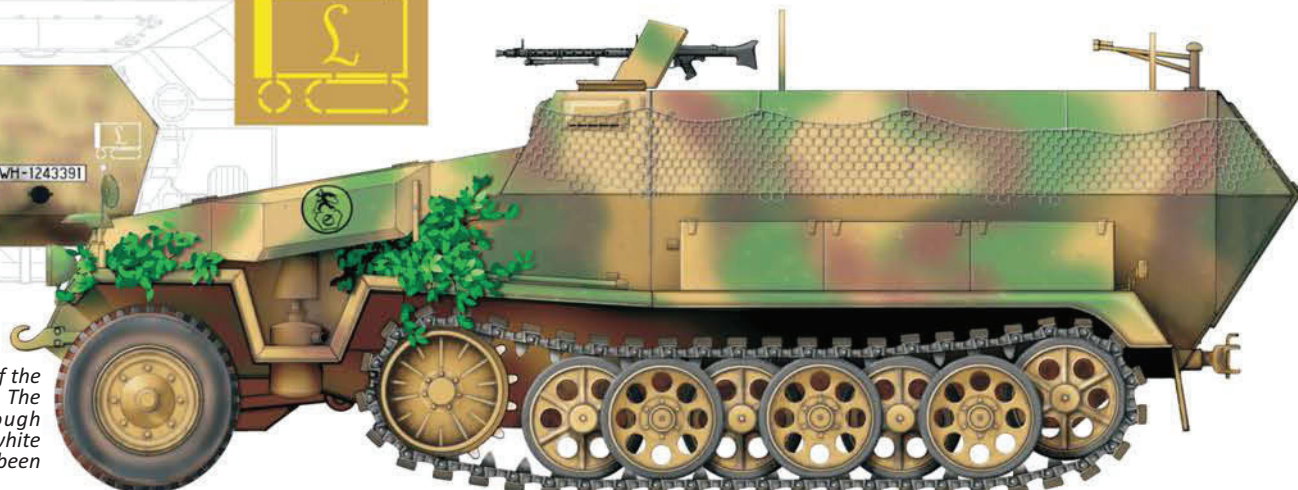
(6) An abbreviation of the German word Jagdbomber or fighter-bomber.

(7) Oberst Reinhard was himself replaced within a few days by General Gerhard Müller, Schwerin's deputy commander, who proved to be so inept that many officers and men of the division refused to obey his orders. By this time Hitler had finally succeeded in having Funk replaced by Eberbach who gave way to Müller's subordinates and reinstated Schwerin. This bizarre story is further complicated by many recent accounts confusing Gerhard Müller with Georg Müller, a colonel who also served with 116.Panzer-Division. The aristocratic Graf von Schwerin seems to have led something of a charmed life as he was again relieved of his command in September and charged with treason for offering to surrender the city of Aachen to the Americans only to be packed off to Italy having suffered nothing worse than a severe reprimand and receiving a promotion into the bargain. Almost certainly involved in the July Plot to kill Hitler, he survived the war to die in 1980.

Below right: Sdkfz 251/3 ausf D. Panzergrenadier-Lehr-Regiment 901, Panzer-Lehr-Division. Photographed in le-Pont-Brocard, a small village about 20 kilometres south-west of Saint Lô, at the end of July, this Funkwagen carries the elaborate insignia of this regiment which is shown and discussed further on page 20. The black, outlined white number 910 is somewhat speculative as the last digit is not completely visible in our photograph. Note that the radio aerials, including the Sternantenne which would have been positioned at the rear, have been omitted from our drawing.

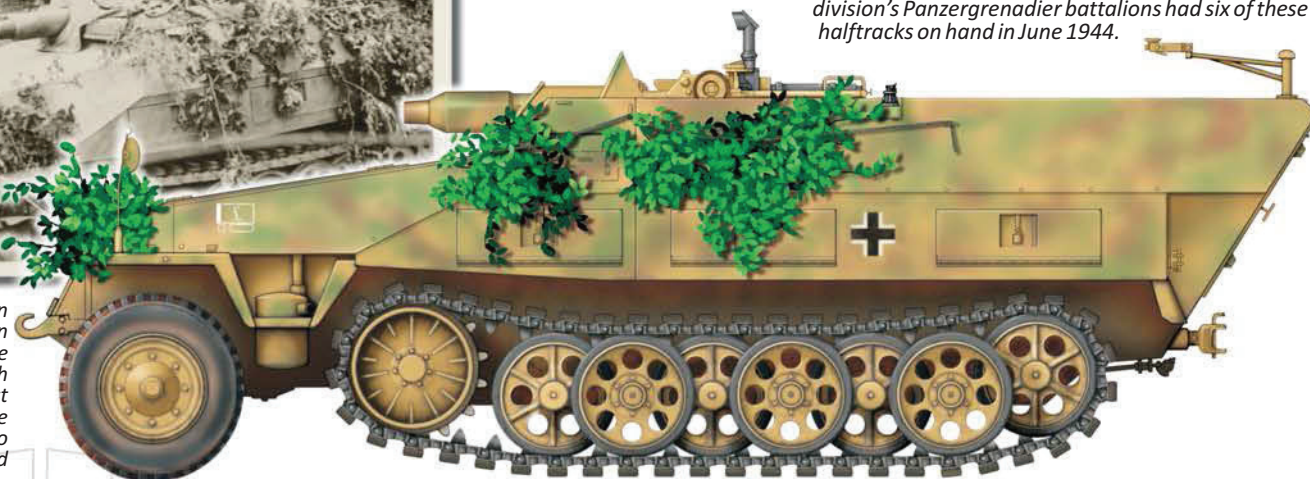


Above: A front view of the vehicle shown at left. The tactical sign although depicted here as white could possibly have been painted in yellow.

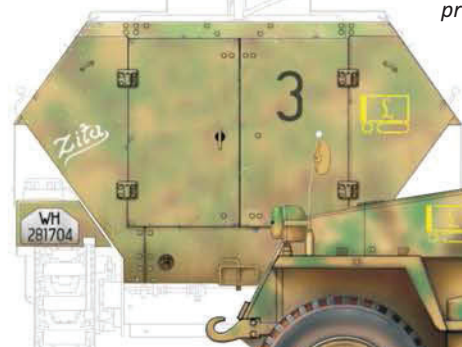


Above: The vehicle on which our illustration at left is based. In the original photograph the tactical sign is just visible behind the foliage attached to the mudguard and hull.

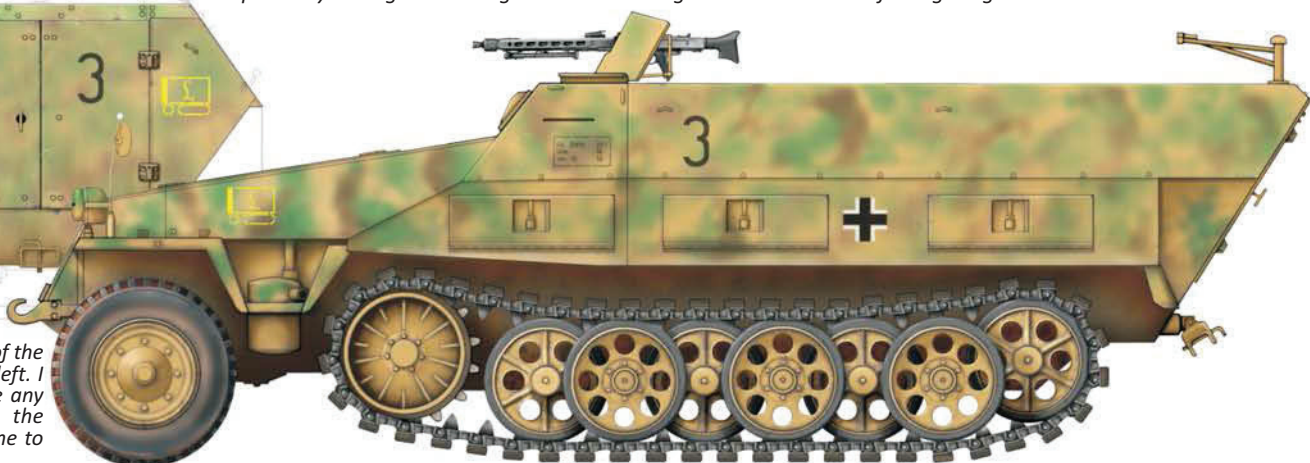
Above: Sdkfz 251/1 ausf C. Panzergrenadier-Lehr-Regiment 901, Panzer-Lehr-Division. Photographed near le-Dézet some weeks prior to the start of Operation Cobra this halftrack also carries the regimental insignia shown above and the tactical sign denoting an armoured infantry unit, combining the division's unit insignia. **Below: Sdkfz 251/9 ausf D. Panzergrenadier-Lehr-Regiment 902. Panzer-Lehr-Division.** Also photographed earlier in the campaign near Juaye-Mondaye south of Caen in the British sector. Each of the division's Panzergrenadier battalions had six of these halftracks on hand in June 1944.

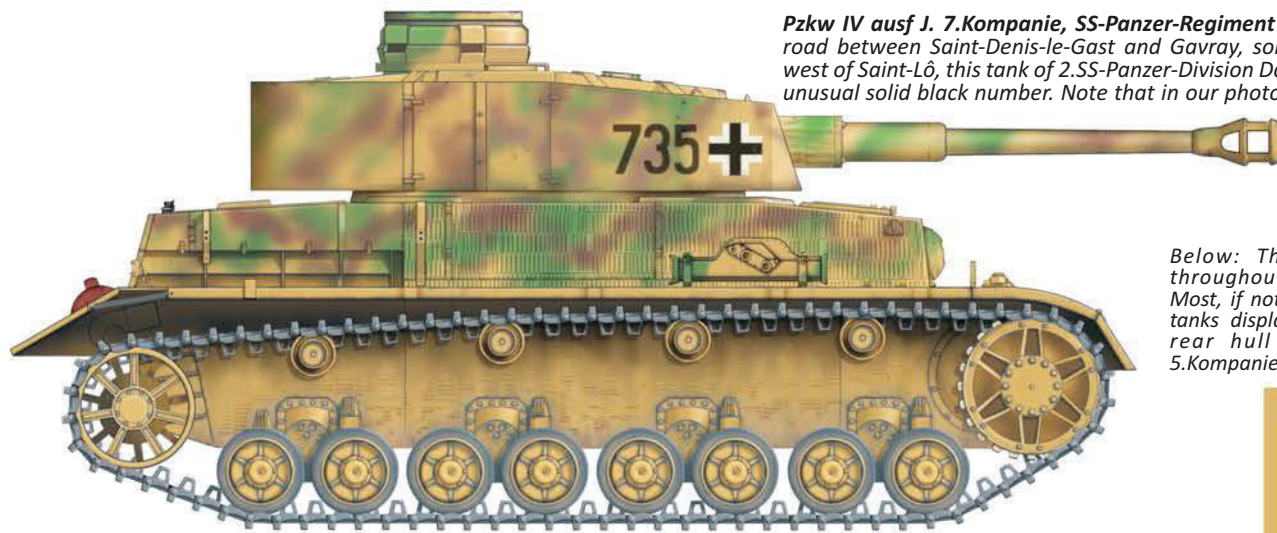


Below: Sdkfz 251/1 ausf D. Panzer-Lehr-Division. Photographed near Cristot south-east of Bayeux this vehicle probably belongs to Panzergrenadier-Lehr-Regiment 901. The use of a single digit number is unusual.



Above: A rear view of the halftrack shown at left. I am content to leave any speculation as to the meaning of the name to the reader.



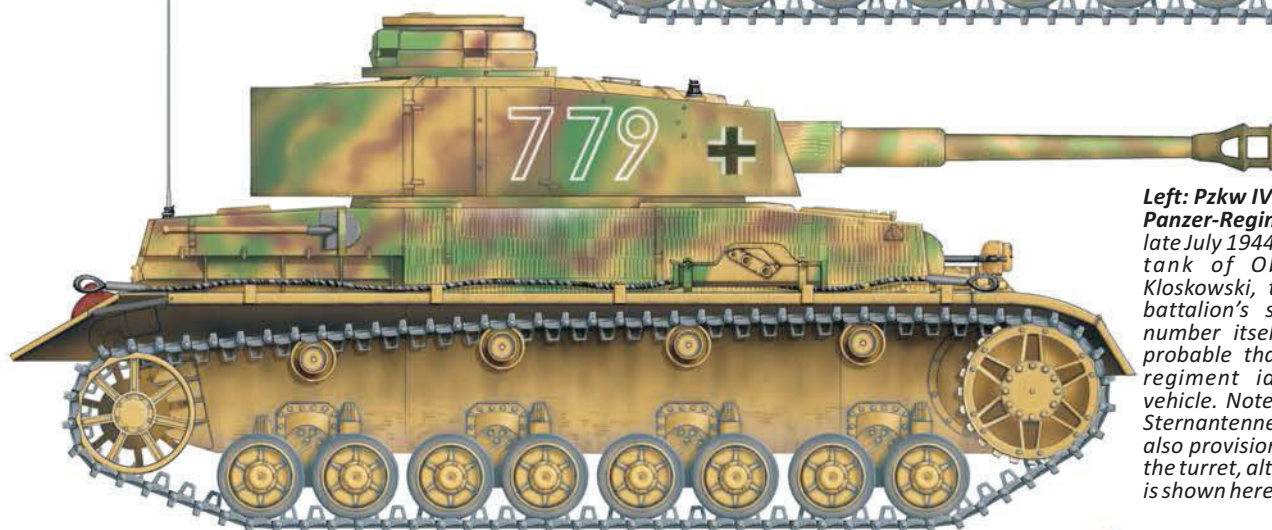
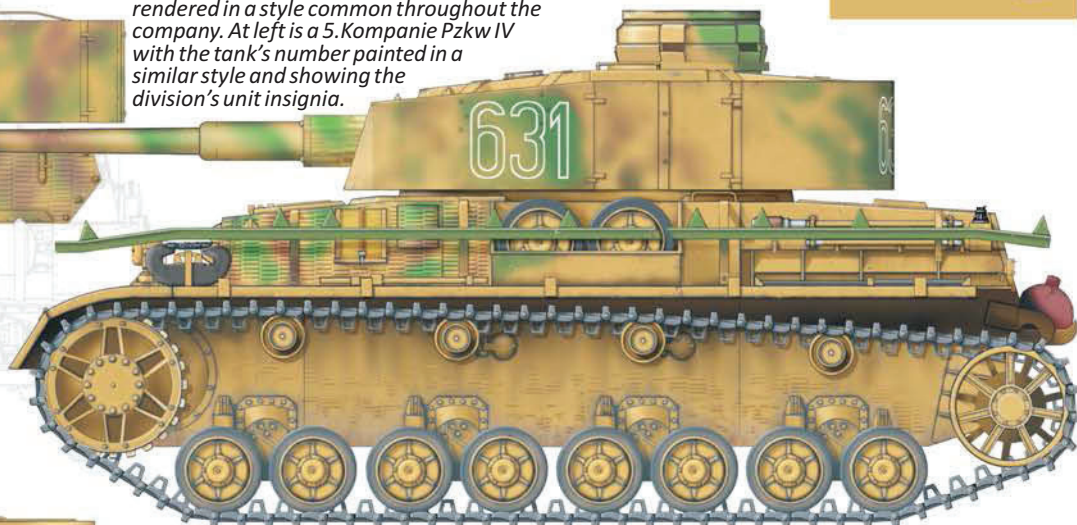


Pzkw IV ausf J. 7.Kompanie, SS-Panzer-Regiment 2. Photographed on the road between Saint-Denis-le-Gast and Gavray, some 30 kilometres south-west of Saint-Lô, this tank of 2.SS-Panzer-Division Das Reich features a rather unusual solid black number. Note that in our photograph the second to last return roller is missing.

Below: The unit insignia used throughout 2.SS-Panzer-Division. Most, if not all, II.Abteilung Pzkw IV tanks displayed this symbol on the rear hull as depicted on the 5.Kompanie tank shown at far left.

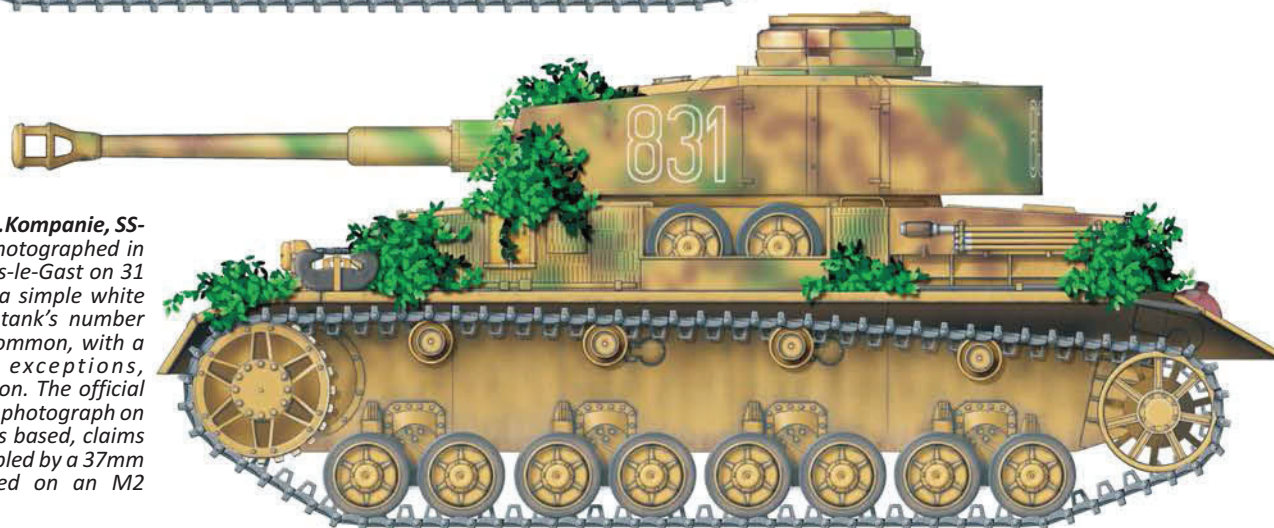


Pzkw IV ausf H or J. 6.Kompanie, SS-Panzer-Regiment 2. Photographed at a vehicle collection point sometime in July 1944, this tank's number is rendered in a style common throughout the company. At left is a 5.Kompanie Pzkw IV with the tank's number painted in a similar style and showing the division's unit insignia.



Left: Pzkw IV ausf J. 7.Kompanie, SS-Panzer-Regiment 2. Photographed in late July 1944, this may have been the tank of Obersturmführer Karl Kloskowski, the commander of the battalion's seventh company. The number itself is unusual and it is probable that the use of 9 in this regiment identified a command vehicle. Note that in addition to the Sternantenne at the rear hull there is also provision for a radio antenna on the turret, although only the insulator is shown here.

Right: Pzkw IV ausf J. 8.Kompanie, SS-Panzer-Regiment 2. Photographed in the town of Saint-Denis-le-Gast on 31 July 1944. The use of a simple white outline to depict the tank's number seems to have been common, with a small number of exceptions, throughout the battalion. The official caption to the US Army photograph on which our illustration is based, claims that this tank was disabled by a 37mm anti-tank gun mounted on an M2 halftrack.



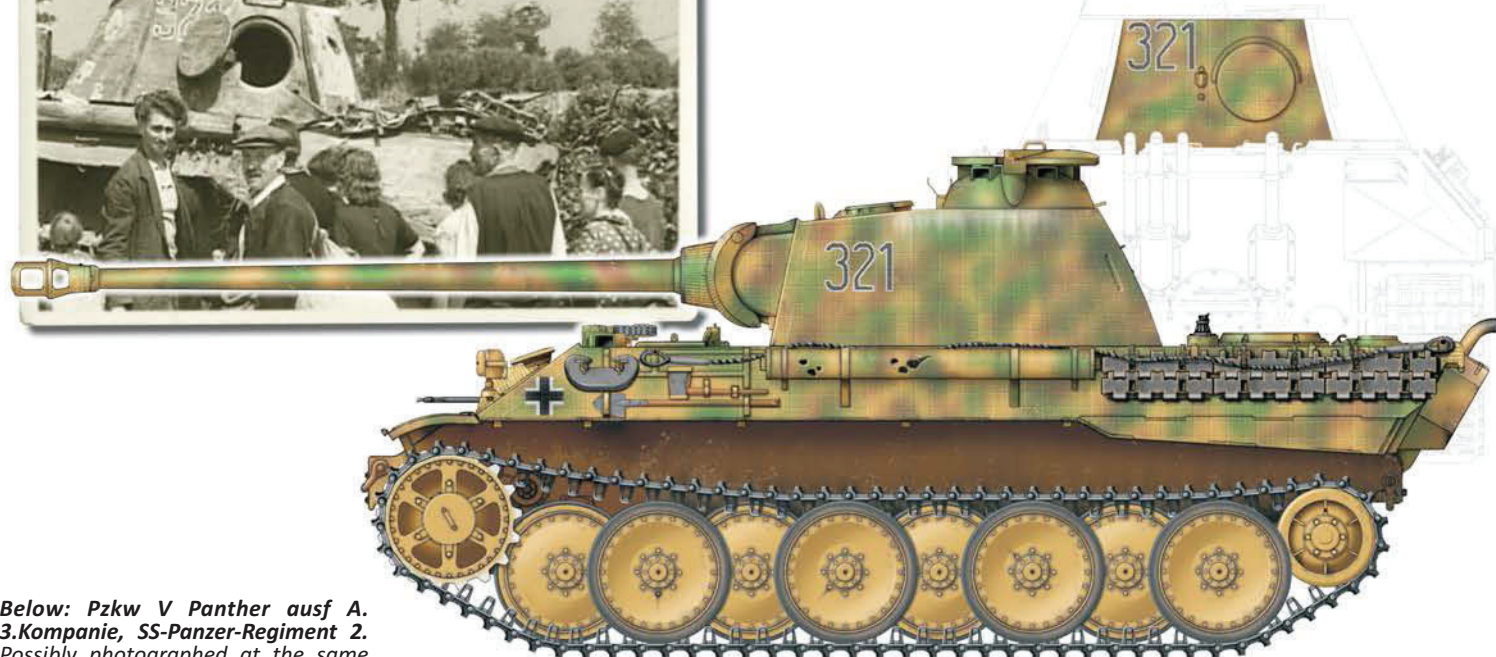
Befehlspanzerwagen V Panther ausf A. SS-Panzer-Regiment 2. The identification of this vehicle with 2.SS-Panzer-Division is almost entirely based on the use of the number 9 which seems to have been an indicator of command vehicles within the division's Panzer regiment.



Above and left: The use of common fencing wire - often referred to as chicken wire - as a means of holding foliage camouflage to any number of surfaces was quite a common practice in Normandy and an example which has survived is shown above. Note that on tanks this was usually restricted to the turret as shown in our illustration.



At left and below: Pzkw V Panther ausf A. 3.Kompanie, SS-Panzer-Regiment 2. Photographed near Villedieu-les-Poêles, just 20 kilometres from the Atlantic coast, this tank is typical of the Panthers of I.Abteilung. Note that the number has been repeated in exactly the same style and size on the turret rear.



Below: Pzkw V Panther ausf A. 3.Kompanie, SS-Panzer-Regiment 2. Possibly photographed at the same time and close to the same location as tank number 321, this vehicle again shows the use of fencing wire as a means of holding local foliage camouflage.



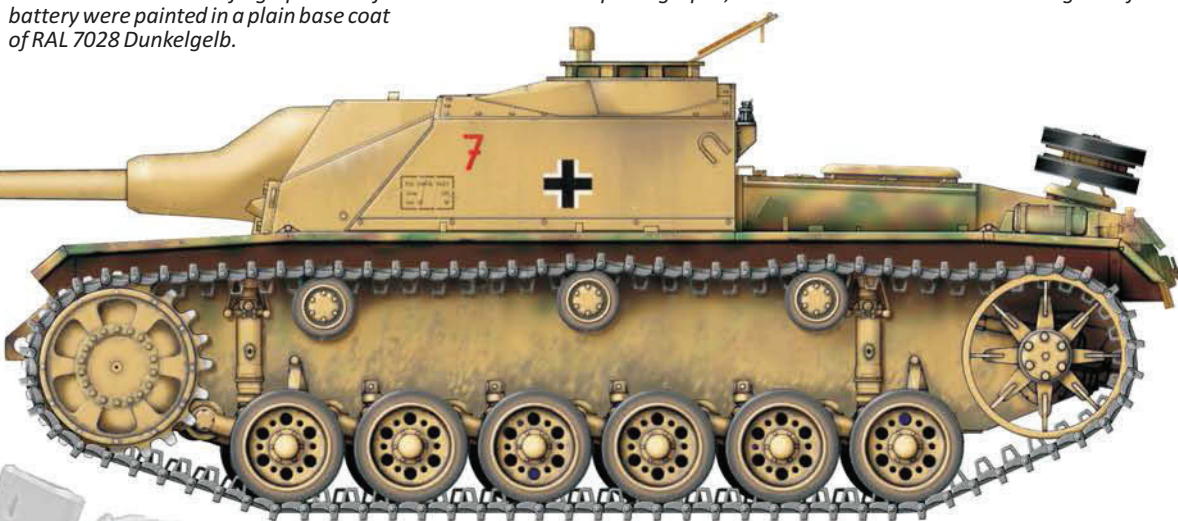
As far as is known, two photographs exist of this tank, both from private collections. While one is very clear the tank itself is obscured by US Army soldiers and some important details cannot be seen. The second image is somewhat blurred but does seem to confirm that this is apparently an early ausf A model without the Kugelblende, or ball mount, for the hull machine gun.

Sturmgeschütz III ausf G. 1.Batterie, Sturmgeschütz-Brigade 341. Photographed near Chambois, at the edge of the Falaise Pocket, this assault gun is typical of the vehicles of 1.Batterie being identified by a single number rendered in a dark colour, shown here as red. As shown by the two examples depicted here, the number could vary considerably in size and style.

Below: The unit insignia of Sturmgeschütz-Brigade 341. It is not known if any of the battalion's assault guns carried this insignia in Normandy and it is included here as a matter of interest only

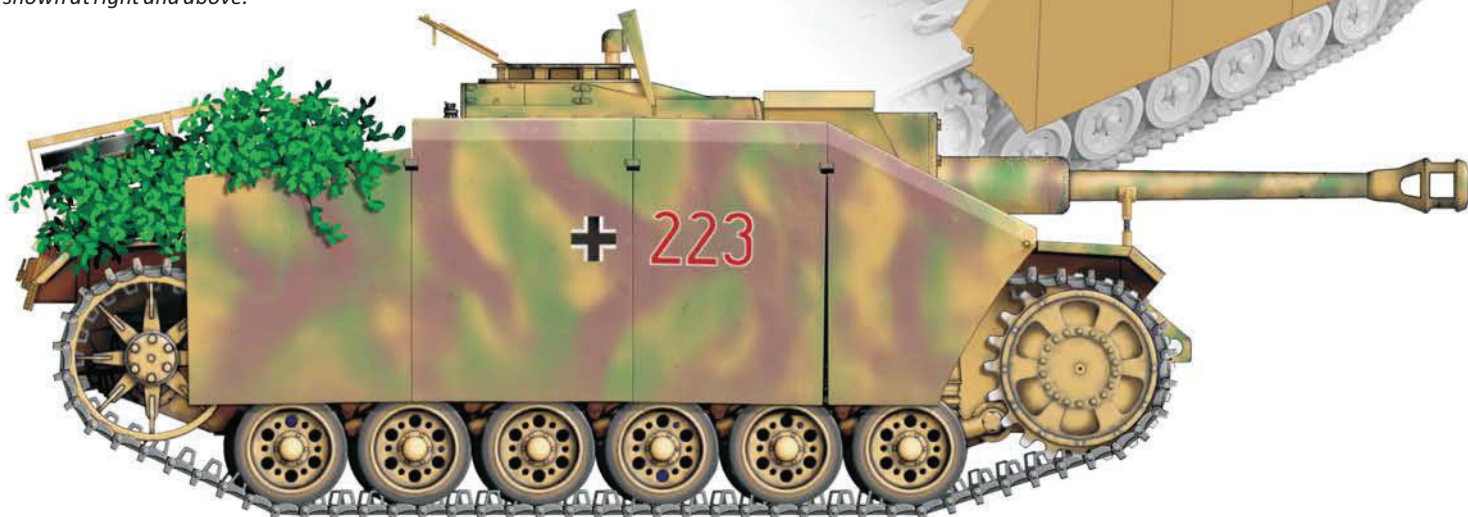


Sturmgeschütz III ausf G. 1.Batterie, Sturmgeschütz-Brigade 341. Although it is often difficult, if not impossible, to describe or even discern camouflage patterns from old monochrome photographs, it seems certain that the assault guns of this battery were painted in a plain base coat of RAL 7028 Dunkelgelb.



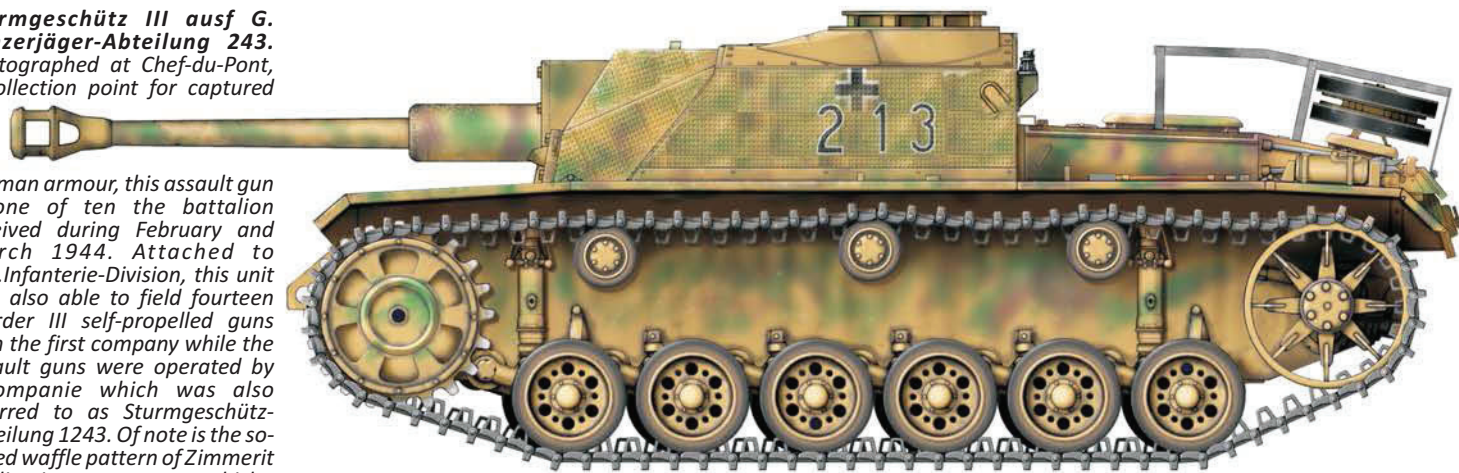
Still forming in early June 1944, this battalion did not take part in the fighting until Monday, 31 July when 1.Batterie went into action in the Brécey - Avranches area losing twelve of its fourteen guns in a few days. By early August the battalion's first and second batteries had almost been completely destroyed, while the third battery was still waiting at Rennes many miles behind the front. Although reinforced at least once during the Normandy campaign - possibly from training facilities within France - by the beginning of September the battalion was able to field only twelve guns.

Sturmgeschütz III ausf G. 2.Batterie, Sturmgeschütz-Brigade 341. Photographed near the railway station at Pontaubault, south of Avranches, this assault gun shows the unusual modification to the hull Schürzen which was apparently common within this battery. Also of note are the shields above the main gun, two versions of which are shown at right and above.



Sturmgeschütz III auf G. Panzerjäger-Abteilung 243.
 Photographed at Chef-du-Pont,
 a collection point for captured

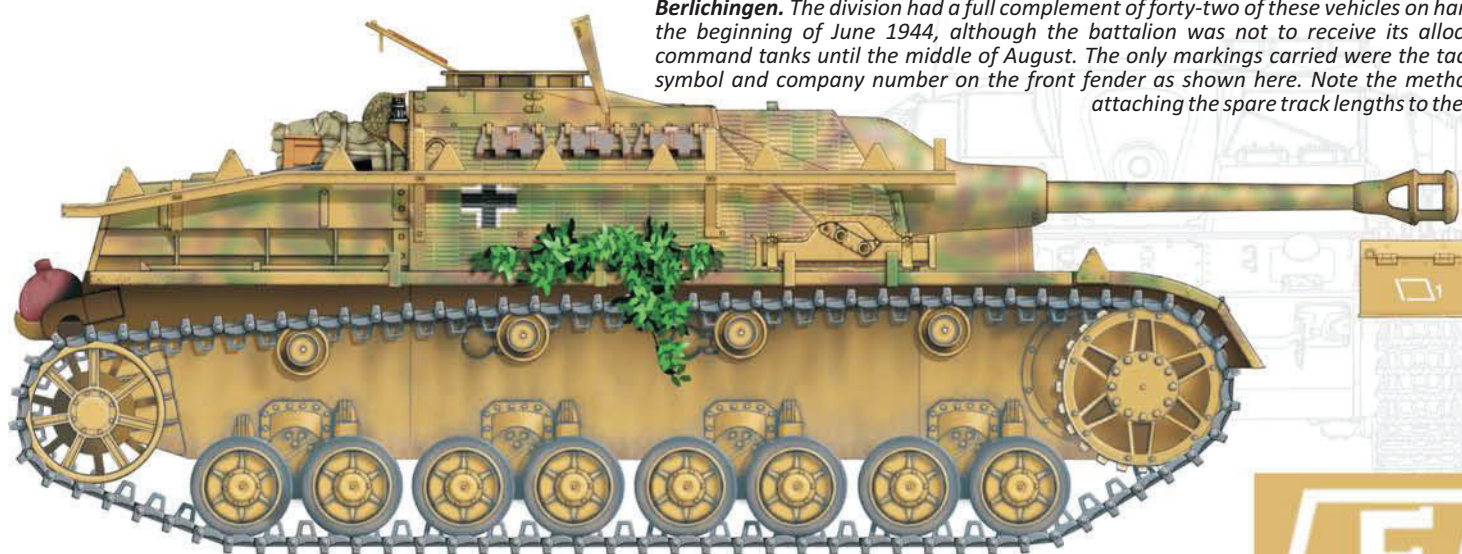
German armour, this assault gun is one of ten the battalion received during February and March 1944. Attached to 243. Infanterie-Division, this unit was also able to field fourteen Marder III self-propelled guns with the first company while the assault guns were operated by 2. Kompanie which was also referred to as Sturmgeschütz-Abteilung 1243. Of note is the so-called waffle pattern of Zimmerit application common to vehicles manufactured by the firm of Alkett of Berlin-Tegel.



Sturmgeschütz III auf G. Panzerjäger-Abteilung 243.
 Also photographed at Chef-du-Pont, south-west of Sainte-Mère-Eglise, this vehicle has been coated with Zimmerit in a checkerboard-like pattern indicative of vehicles manufactured by the MIAG Amme-Werke of Braunschweig.

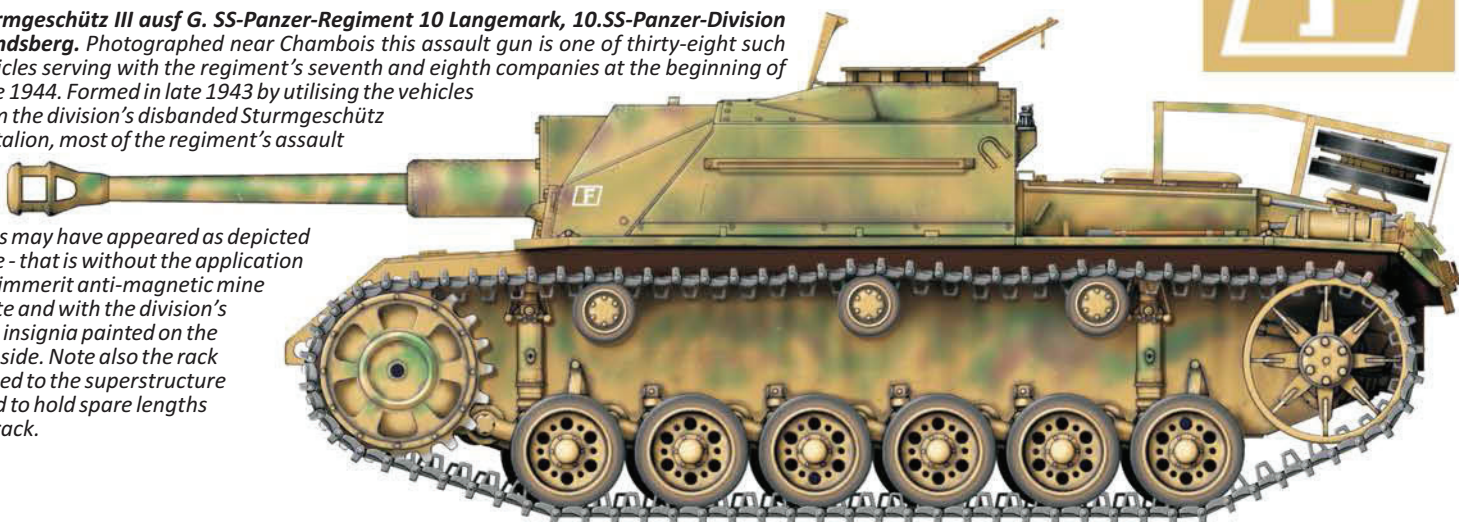


Sturmgeschütz IV. SS-Panzer-Abteilung 17, 17. SS-Panzergrenadier-Division Götz von Berlichingen. The division had a full complement of forty-two of these vehicles on hand at the beginning of June 1944, although the battalion was not to receive its allocated command tanks until the middle of August. The only markings carried were the tactical symbol and company number on the front fender as shown here. Note the method of attaching the spare track lengths to the hull.

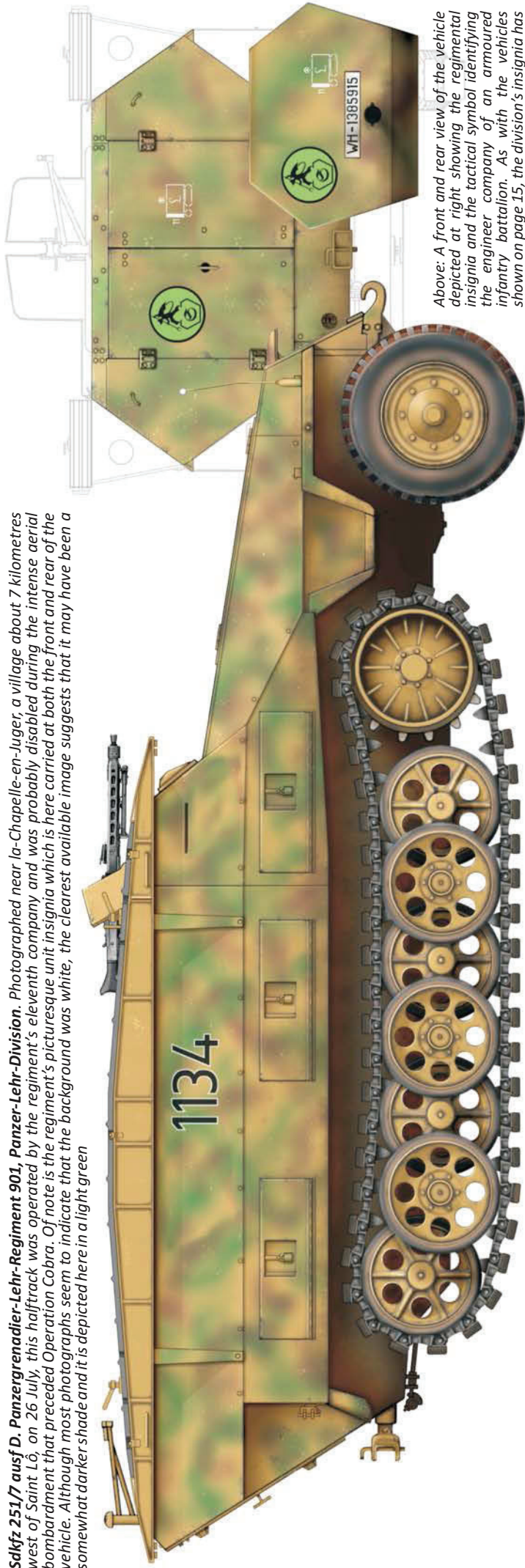


Sturmgeschütz III auf G. SS-Panzer-Regiment 10 Langemark, 10. SS-Panzer-Division Frundsberg. Photographed near Chambois this assault gun is one of thirty-eight such vehicles serving with the regiment's seventh and eighth companies at the beginning of June 1944. Formed in late 1943 by utilising the vehicles from the division's disbanded Sturmgeschütz battalion, most of the regiment's assault

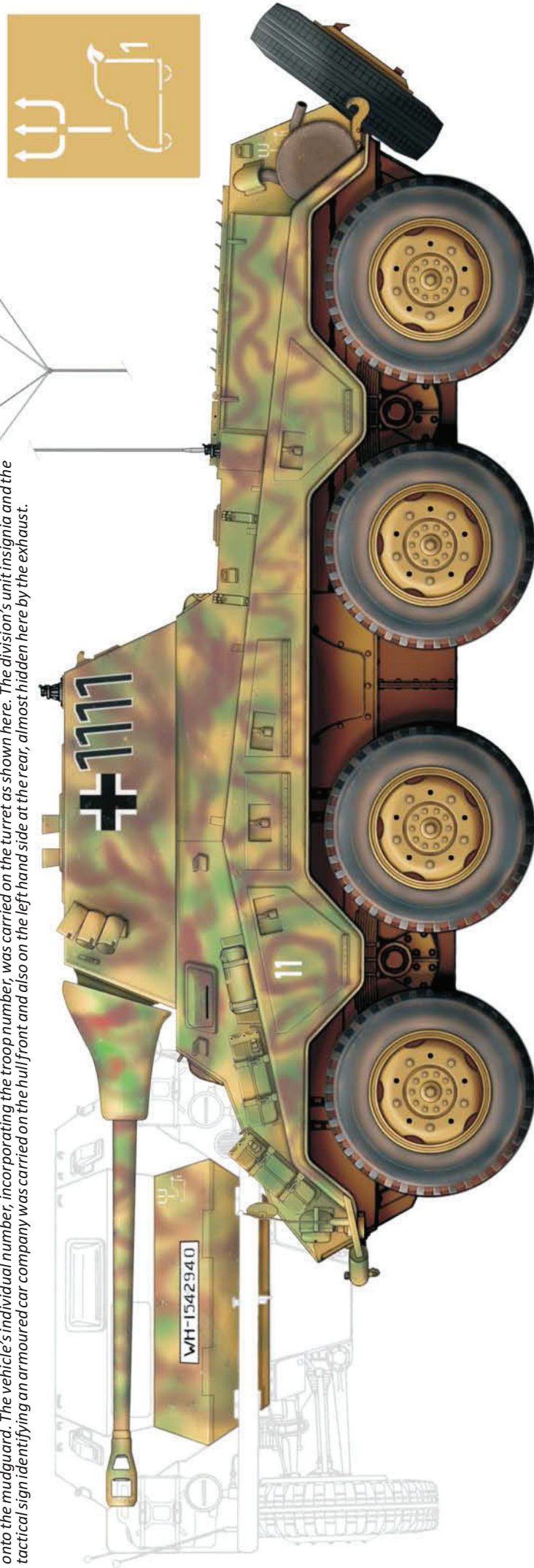
guns may have appeared as depicted here - that is without the application of Zimmerit anti-magnetic mine paste and with the division's unit insignia painted on the hull side. Note also the rack bolted to the superstructure used to hold spare lengths of track.



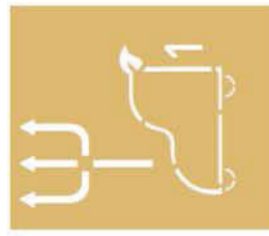
Sdkfz 251/7 ausf D, Panzergrenadier-Lehr-Regiment 901, Panzer-Lehr-Division. Photographed near la-Chapelle-en-Juger, a village about 7 kilometres west of Saint Lô, on 26 July, this halftrack was operated by the regiment's eleventh company and was probably disabled during the intense aerial bombardment that preceded Operation Cobra. Of note is the regiment's picturesque unit insignia which is here carried at both the front and rear of the vehicle. Although most photographs seem to indicate that the background was white, the clearest available image suggests that it may have been a somewhat darker shade and it is depicted here in a light green



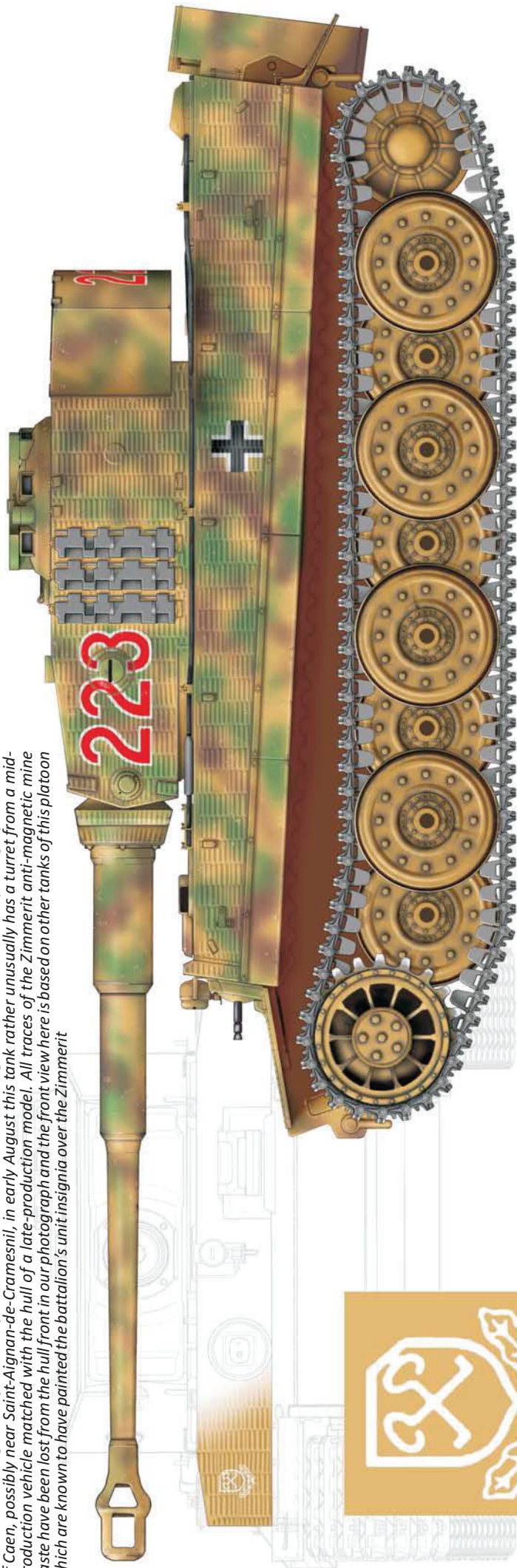
Sdkfz 234/2 1. Kompanie, Panzer-Aufklärungs-Abteilung 2, 2. Panzer-Division. Unlike most battalions, this unit identified its vehicles by Truppe - troop - rather than Züge or platoons. Each troop contained two armoured cars, some twenty four being the type shown here, and was identified by the troop number painted onto the mudguard. The vehicle's individual number, incorporating the troop number, was carried on the turret as shown here. The division's unit insignia and the tactical sign identifying an armoured car company was carried on the hull front and also on the left hand side at the rear, almost hidden here by the exhaust.



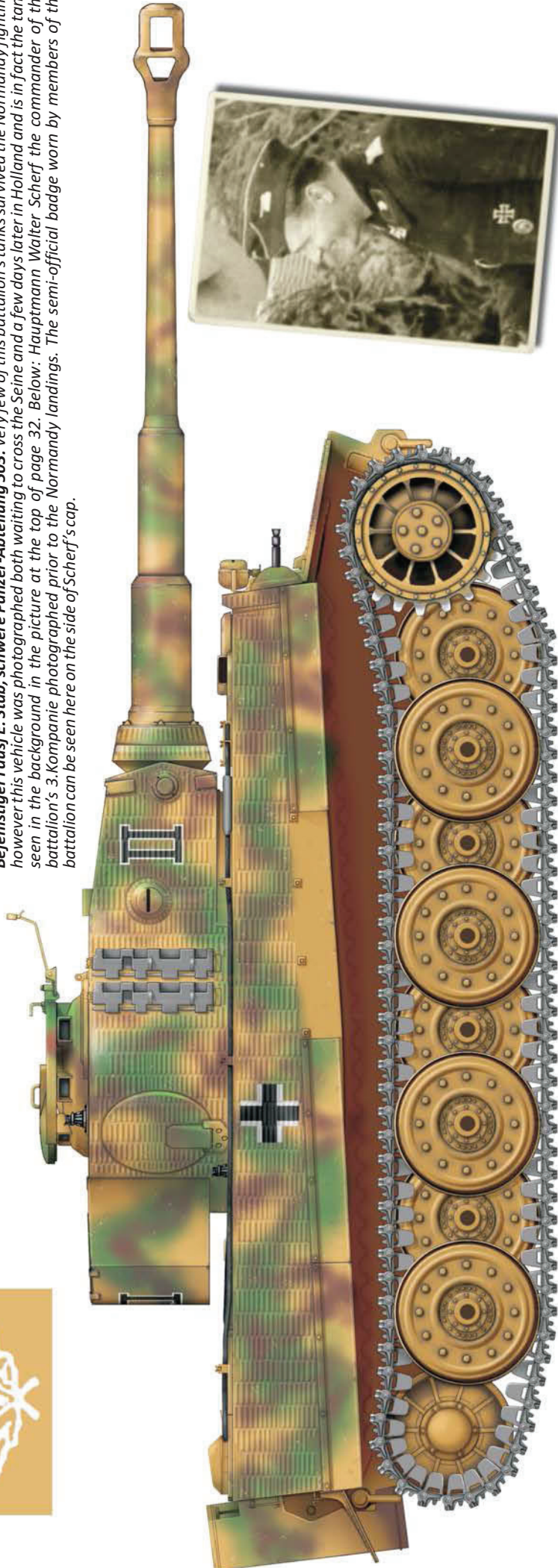
Above: A front and rear view of the vehicle depicted at right showing the regimental insignia and the tactical symbol identifying the engineer company of an armoured infantry battalion. As with the vehicles shown on page 15, the division's insignia has been incorporated into the tactical sign.



Below: Pzkw VI Tiger I auf E. 2. Kompanie, schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 101. Said to have been photographed south of Caen, possibly near Saint-Aignan-de-Cramesnil, in early August this tank rather unusually has a turret from a mid-production vehicle matched with the hull of a late-production model. All traces of the Zimmerit anti-magnetic mine paste have been lost from the hull front in our photograph and the front view here is based on other tanks of this platoon which are known to have painted the battalion's unit insignia over the Zimmerit



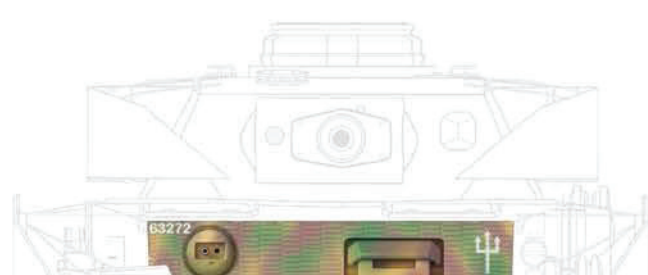
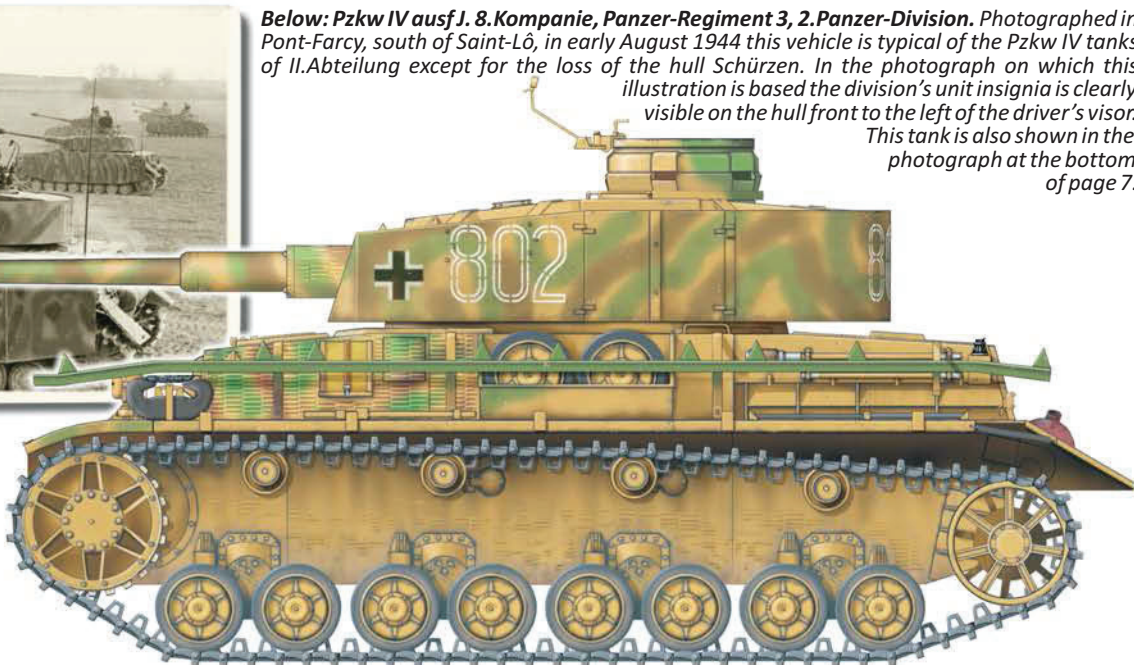
Befehlshaber I auf E. Stab, schwere Panzer-Abteilung 503. Very few of this battalion's tanks survived the Normandy fighting however this vehicle was photographed both waiting to cross the Seine and a few days later in Holland and is in fact the tank seen in the background in the picture at the top of page 32. Below: Hauptmann Walter Scherf the commander of the battalion's 3. Kompanie photographed prior to the Normandy landings. The semi-official badge worn by members of the battalion can be seen here on the side of Scherf's cap.





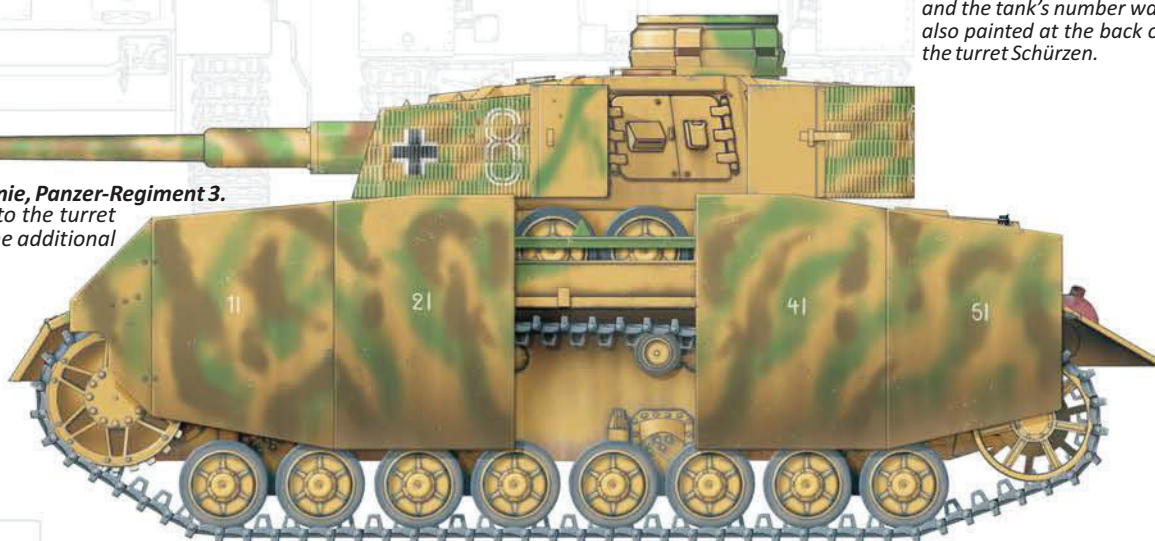
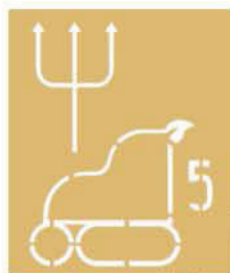
Below: Pzkw IV ausf J. 8.Kompanie, Panzer-Regiment 3, 2.Panzer-Division. Photographed in Pont-Farcy, south of Saint-Lô, in early August 1944 this vehicle is typical of the Pzkw IV tanks of II.Abtteilung except for the loss of the hull Schürzen. In the photograph on which this illustration is based the division's unit insignia is clearly visible on the hull front to the left of the driver's visor. This tank is also shown in the photograph at the bottom of page 7.

Above: Pzkw IV tanks of Panzer-Regiment 3 in training prior to June 1944. The heavily sprayed lines of two dark camouflage colours on a base coat of RAL 7028 Dunkelgelb was common to the tanks of the regiment's II.Abtteilung. In the original photograph it is possible to see the notation on each panel of the hull Schürzen described below.

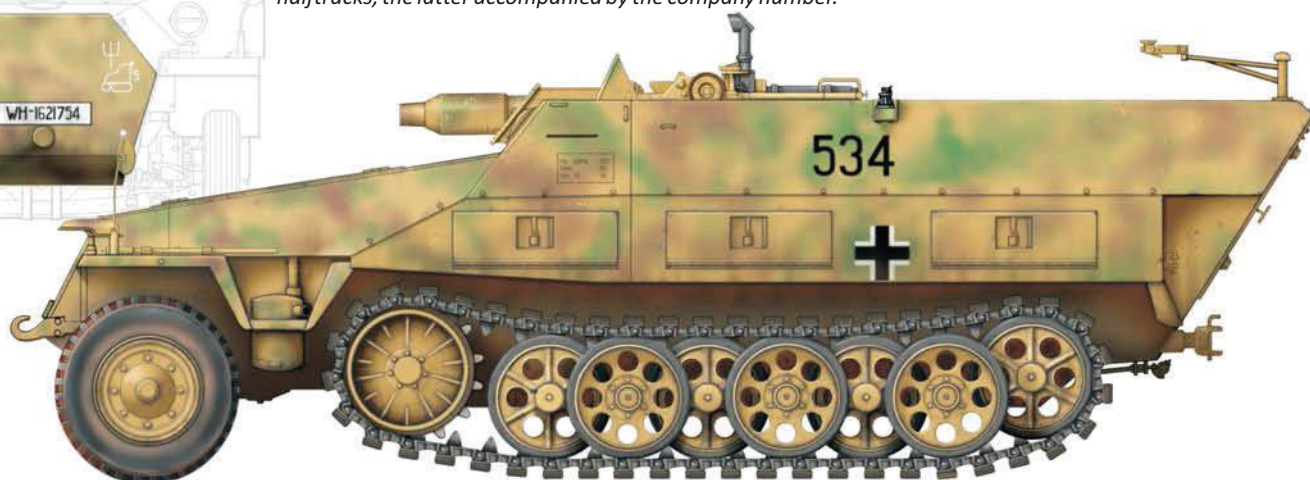
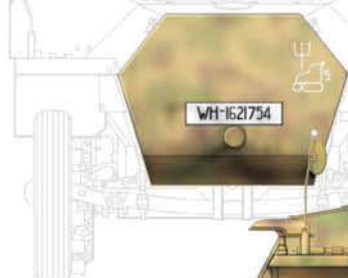


At right and far right: Typical application of markings for the Pzkw IV tanks of II.Abtteilung. The front view shows the division's unit insignia at the hull front near the driver's visor and the Fahrgestellnummer, or chassis number, next to the machine gun mount. The unit insignia was usually repeated on the hull rear plate on the right hand side and the tank's number was also painted at the back of the turret Schürzen.

At right: Pzkw IV ausf H. 8.Kompanie, Panzer-Regiment 3. Note the application of Zimmerit to the turret Schürzen and that each panel of the additional hull armour has been marked in sequence - either left or right.

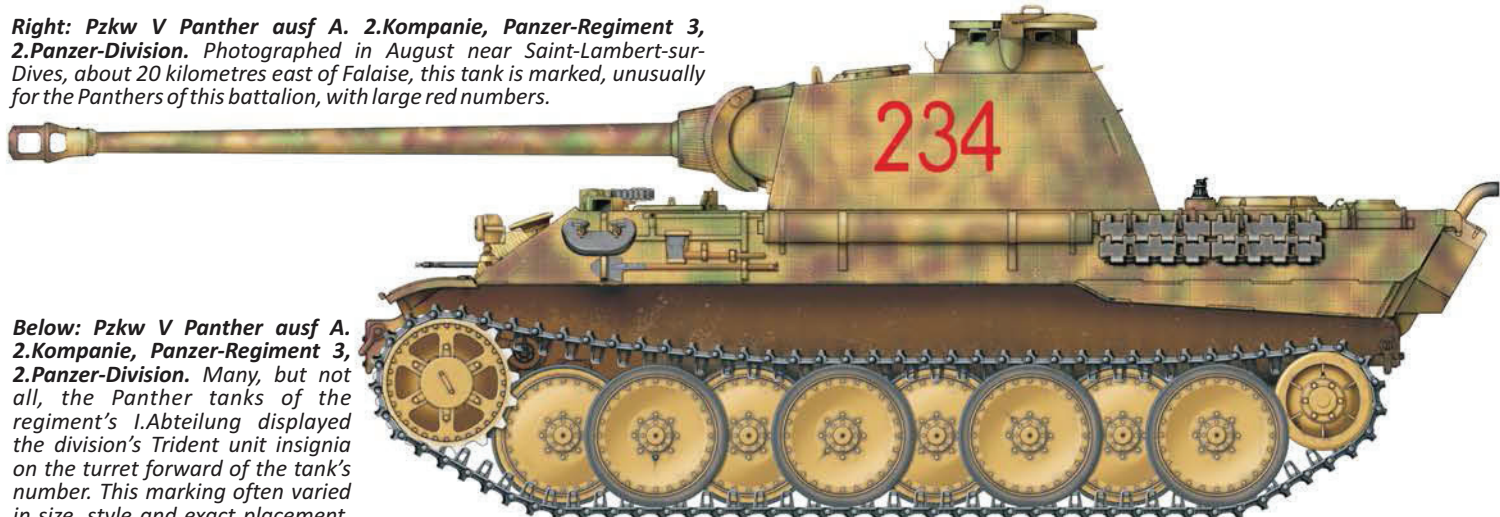


Below: Sdkfz 251/9 ausf D. 5.Kompanie, Panzer-Aufklärungs-Abteilung 2. The division's reconnaissance battalion had six of these vehicles on hand in June 1944. At left: A front view of the same vehicle showing the division's Trident unit insignia and the tactical symbol identifying a reconnaissance company equipped with halftracks, the latter accompanied by the company number.

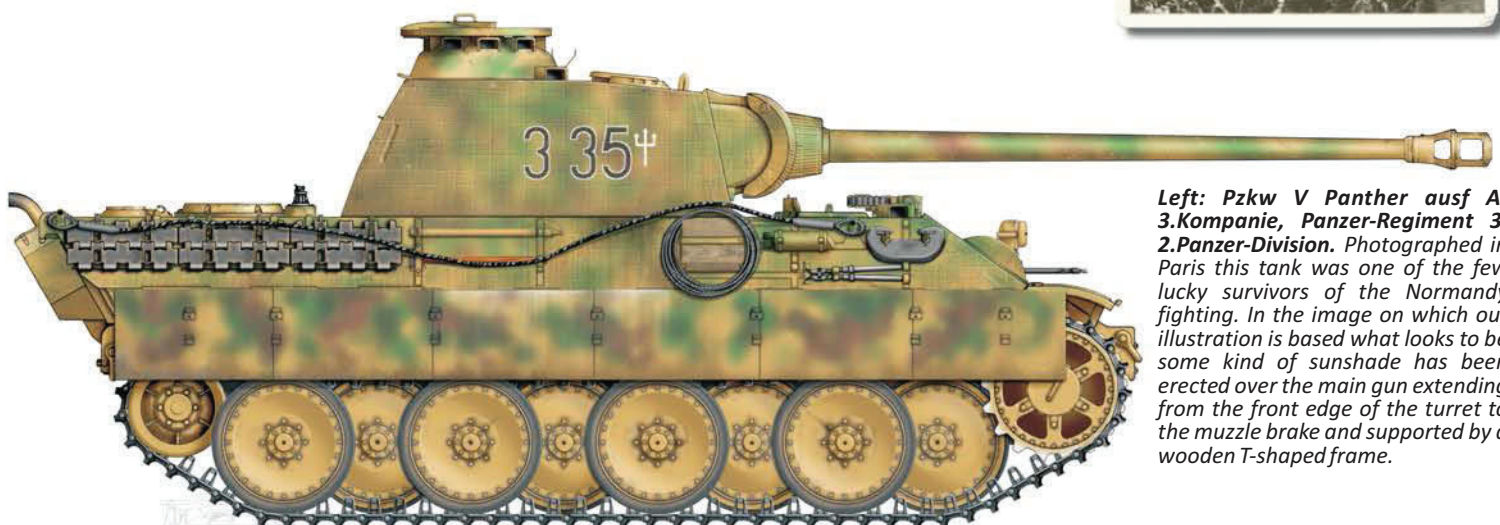


Right: Pzkw V Panther ausf A. 2.Kompanie, Panzer-Regiment 3, 2.Panzer-Division. Photographed in August near Saint-Lambert-sur-Dives, about 20 kilometres east of Falaise, this tank is marked, unusually for the Panthers of this battalion, with large red numbers.

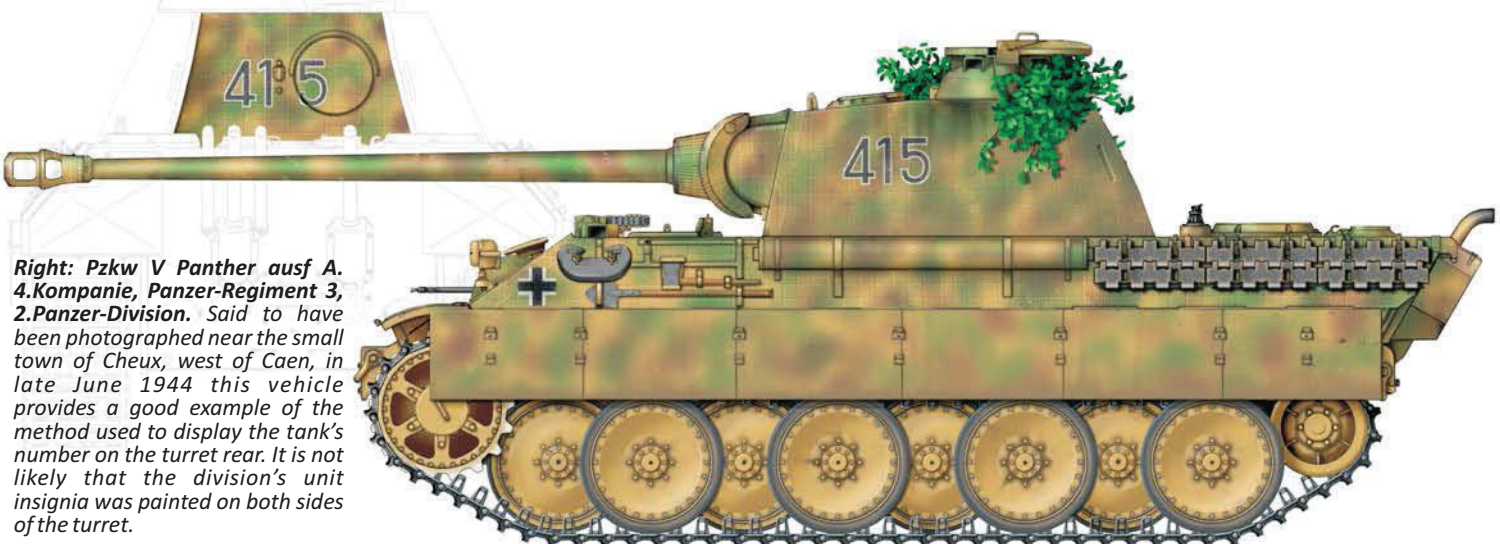
Below: Pzkw V Panther ausf A. 2.Kompanie, Panzer-Regiment 3, 2.Panzer-Division. Many, but not all, the Panther tanks of the regiment's I.Abteilung displayed the division's Trident unit insignia on the turret forward of the tank's number. This marking often varied in size, style and exact placement. The number, although rendered here as black with a white outline, may also have been a very dark red.



Below: The photograph on which the illustration at left is based. The division's unit insignia can be clearly seen on the turret side above the crewman holding the 7.5cm shell.



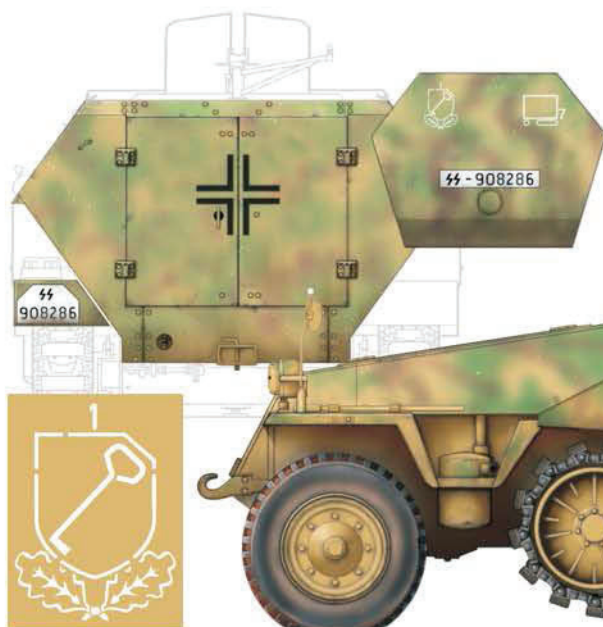
Left: Pzkw V Panther ausf A. 3.Kompanie, Panzer-Regiment 3, 2.Panzer-Division. Photographed in Paris this tank was one of the few lucky survivors of the Normandy fighting. In the image on which our illustration is based what looks to be some kind of sunshade has been erected over the main gun extending from the front edge of the turret to the muzzle brake and supported by a wooden T-shaped frame.



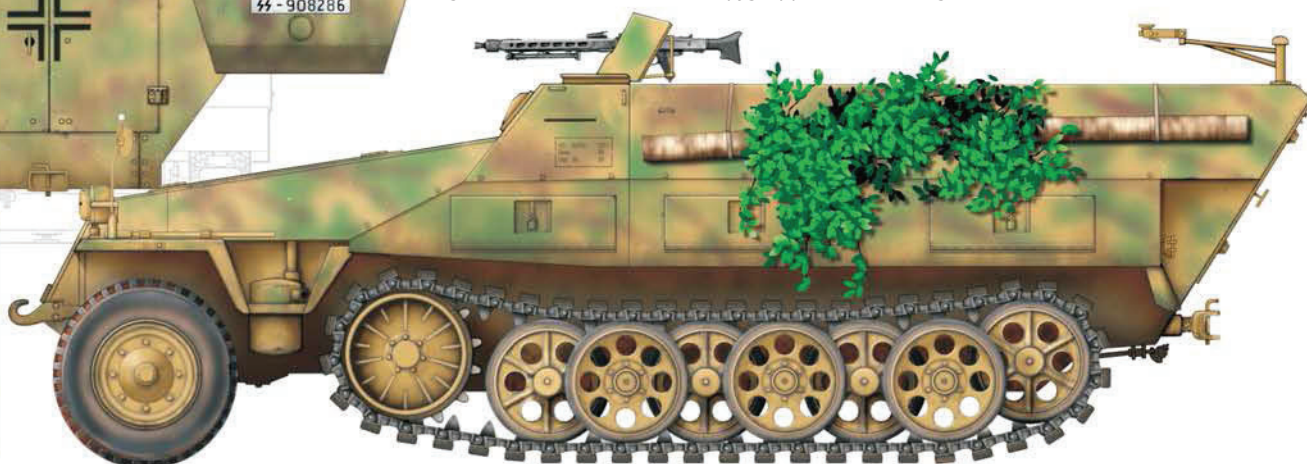
Right: Pzkw V Panther ausf A. 4.Kompanie, Panzer-Regiment 3, 2.Panzer-Division. Said to have been photographed near the small town of Cheux, west of Caen, in late June 1944 this vehicle provides a good example of the method used to display the tank's number on the turret rear. It is not likely that the division's unit insignia was painted on both sides of the turret.



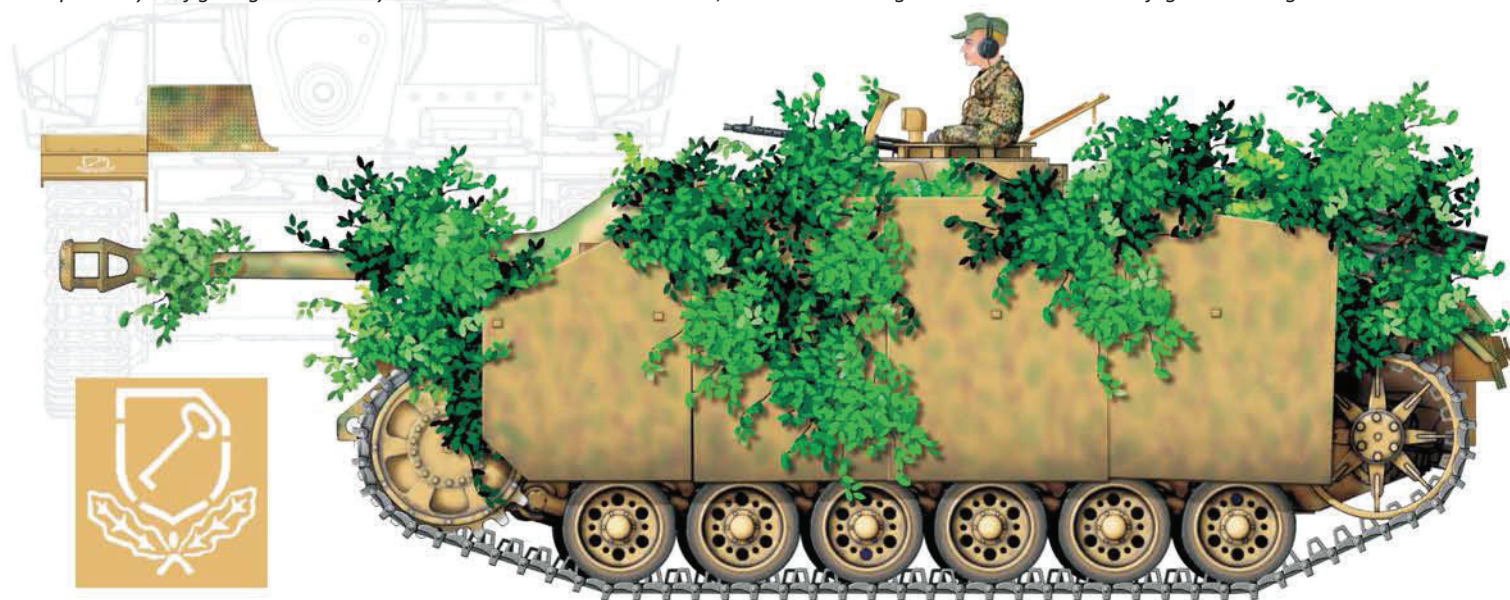
Sdkfz 234/2. Stab, SS-Panzer-Aufklärungs-Abteilung 1. The headquarters of the reconnaissance battalion of 1.SS-Panzer-Division had ten of these vehicles on hand in mid-June 1944 organised into two Züge or platoons. The turret numbers of each armoured car began with a zero followed by 2 for the first platoon and 3 for the second. Presumably the last number was used as a means of individual identification. These elegant vehicles are often incorrectly referred to by the name Puma which is in fact a post-war appellation and was never used, at least for these armoured cars, before 1945. Most, if not all, these vehicles were lost in the Normandy fighting. At left: the photograph on which our illustration is based. This vehicle was in fact featured in quite a lengthy piece of newsreel film made for the Deutsche Wochenschau which many readers will no doubt be familiar with.

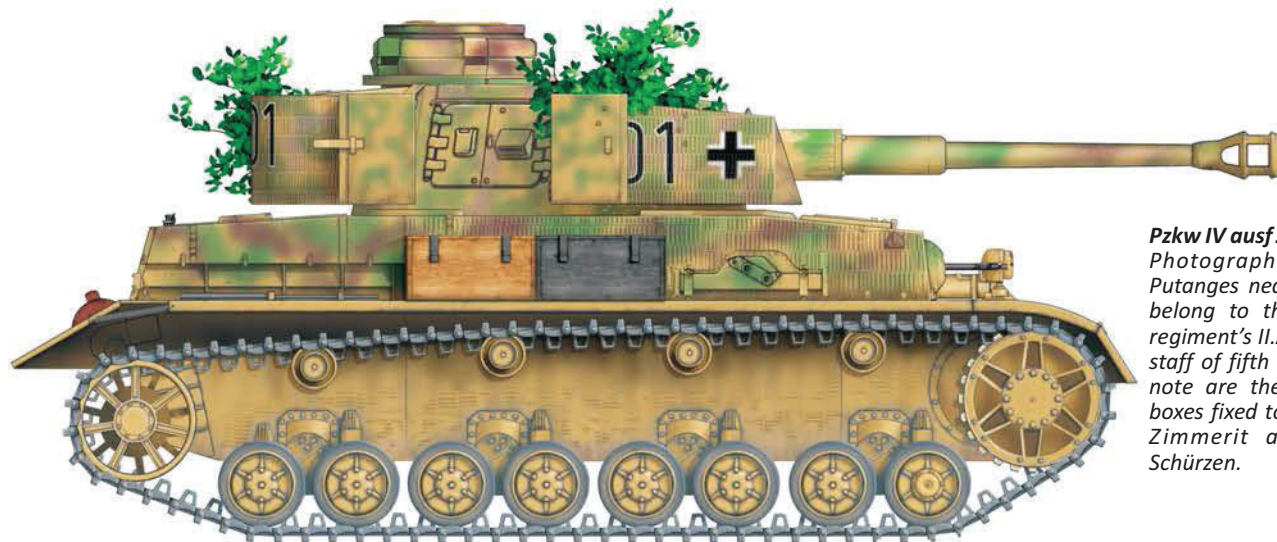


Below: Sdkfz 251/1 ausf D. 7.Kompanie, SS-Panzergranadier-Regiment 1. The illustrations presented here are in fact a composite of two separate halftracks belonging to 1.SS-Panzer-Division. The side and back views are based on a photograph taken near Mortain in early August 1944 while an image of a similar vehicle made near Falaise shortly afterwards was used for the front view. The black outline Balkenkreuz was commonly seen on the regiment's halftracks as was the log and foliage camouflage strapped to the hull side. Parts of this regiment were attached to Kampfgruppe Knittel during the Mortain counterattack

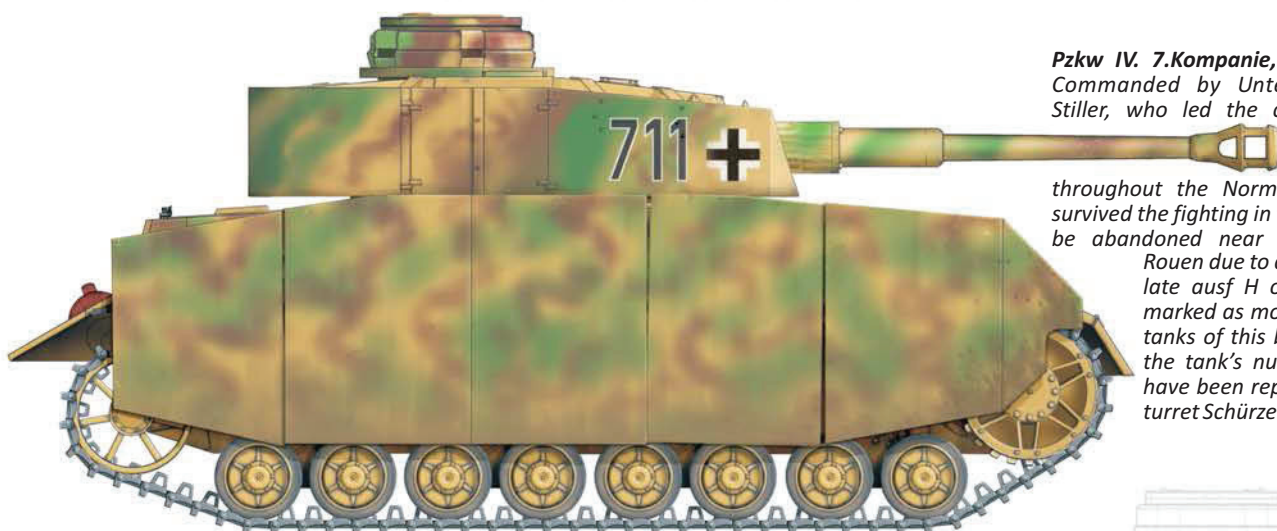


Below: Sturmgeschütz III ausf G. SS-Sturmgeschütz-Abteilung 1. Photographed earlier in the campaign heading towards the front, this assault gun is devoid of any markings other than the division's unit insignia painted onto the right front fender. The so-called waffle pattern Zimmerit is quite clear in the photograph used to create this illustration identifying this as an Alkett produced vehicle. The battalion had a full complement of forty-five assault guns in June 1944 but was so depleted by the fighting in Normandy that it was disbanded in November, it's members being used to rebuild SS-Panzerjäger-Abteilung 1



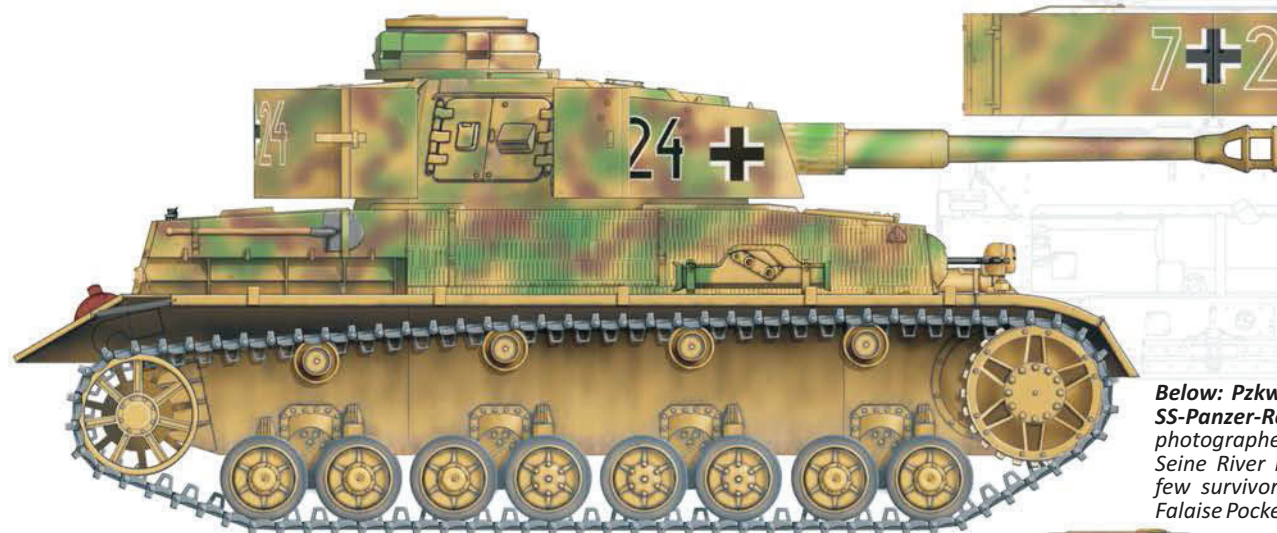


Pzkw IV ausf J. SS-Panzer-Regiment 1. Photographed in the village of Putanges near Falaise this tank may belong to the headquarters of the regiment's II. Abteilung or possibly the staff of fifth or eighth companies. Of note are the two wooden stowage boxes fixed to the mudguard and the Zimmerit applied to the turret Schürzen.



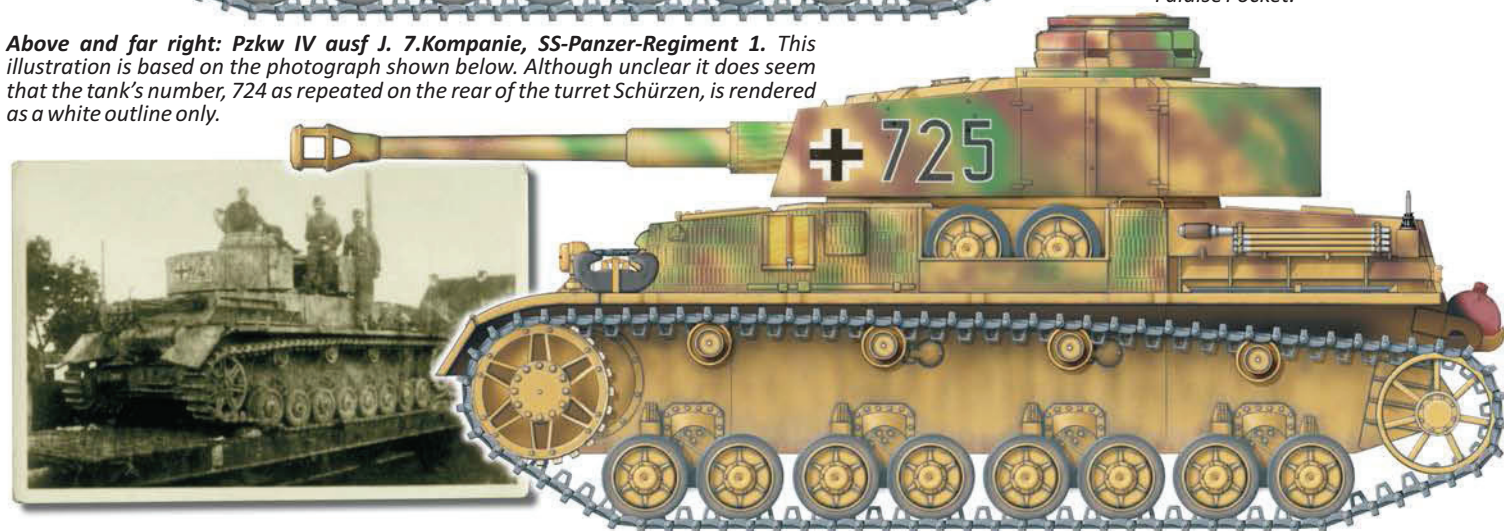
Pzkw IV. 7. Kompanie, SS-Panzer-Regiment 1. Commanded by Untersturmführer Gerhard Stiller, who led the company's first platoon

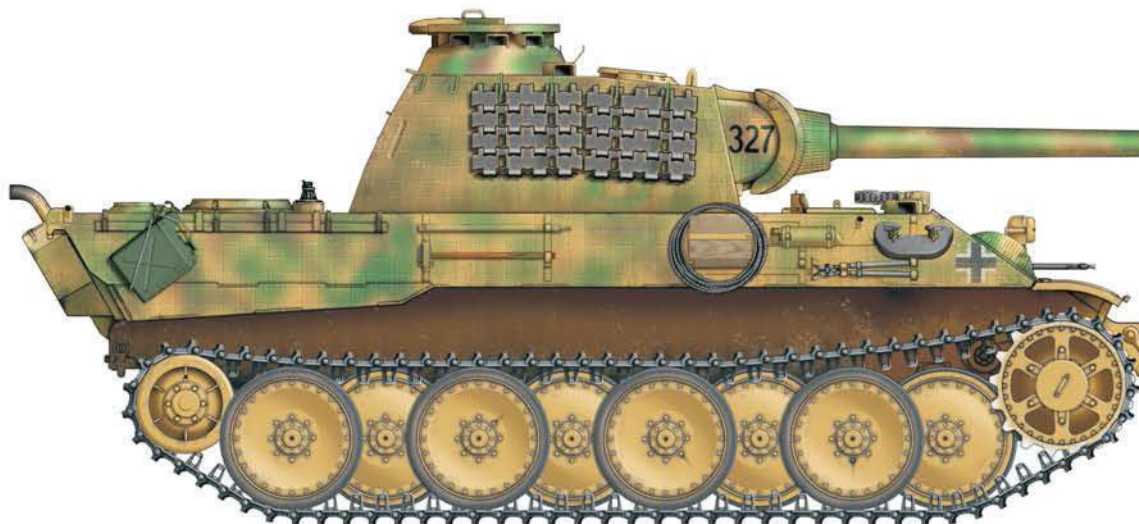
throughout the Normandy battles, this tank survived the fighting in the Falaise Pocket only to be abandoned near Elbeuf-sur-Andelle near Rouen due to a mechanical failure. This late ausf H or early ausf J model is marked as most, if not all, the Pzkw IV tanks of this battalion were, although the tank's number does not seem to have been repeated on the rear of the turret Schürzen.



Below: Pzkw IV ausf J. 7. Kompanie, SS-Panzer-Regiment 1. This tank, photographed crossing one of the Seine River bridges, was one of the few survivors of the fighting in the Falaise Pocket.

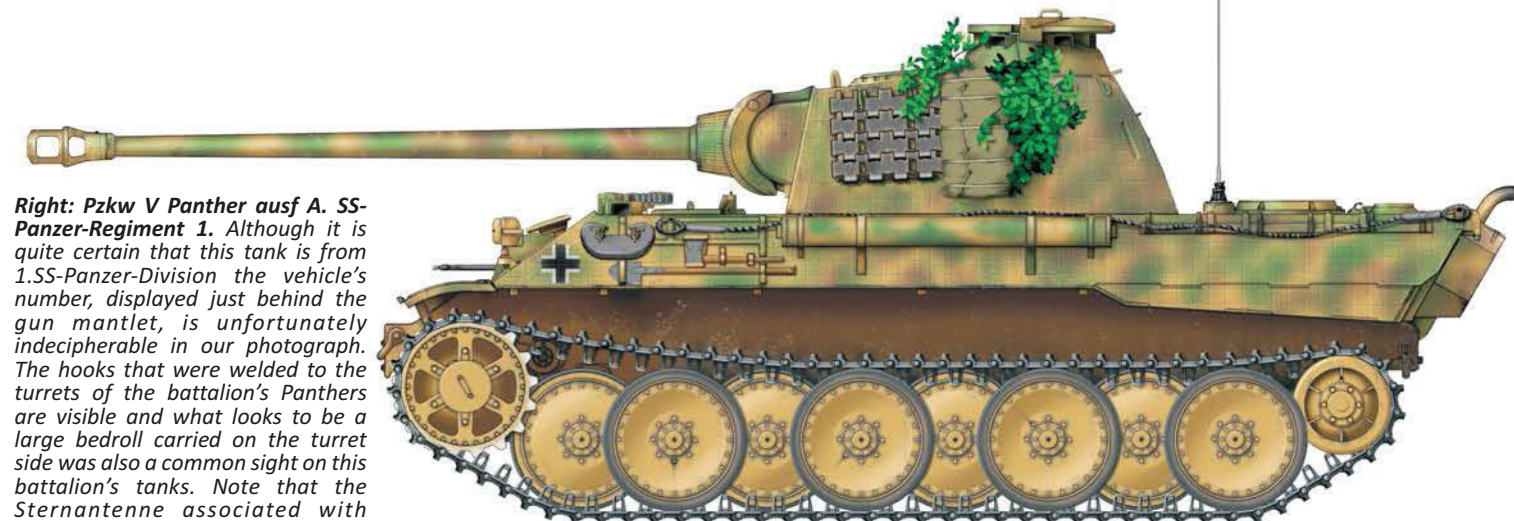
Above and far right: Pzkw IV ausf J. 7. Kompanie, SS-Panzer-Regiment 1. This illustration is based on the photograph shown below. Although unclear it does seem that the tank's number, 724 as repeated on the rear of the turret Schürzen, is rendered as a white outline only.





Left: Pzkw V Panther ausf A. 3.Kompanie, SS-Panzer-Regiment 1. Photographed earlier in the campaign, this tank shows the

method of displaying the vehicle's number common to this unit. Most, if not all, the battalion's Panther tanks had hooks welded to the turret roof on both sides from which spare lengths of track were suspended. Consequently, the number was painted just behind the gun mantlet as shown here. The actual application of the numbers ranged from neat and clear to careless but legible.

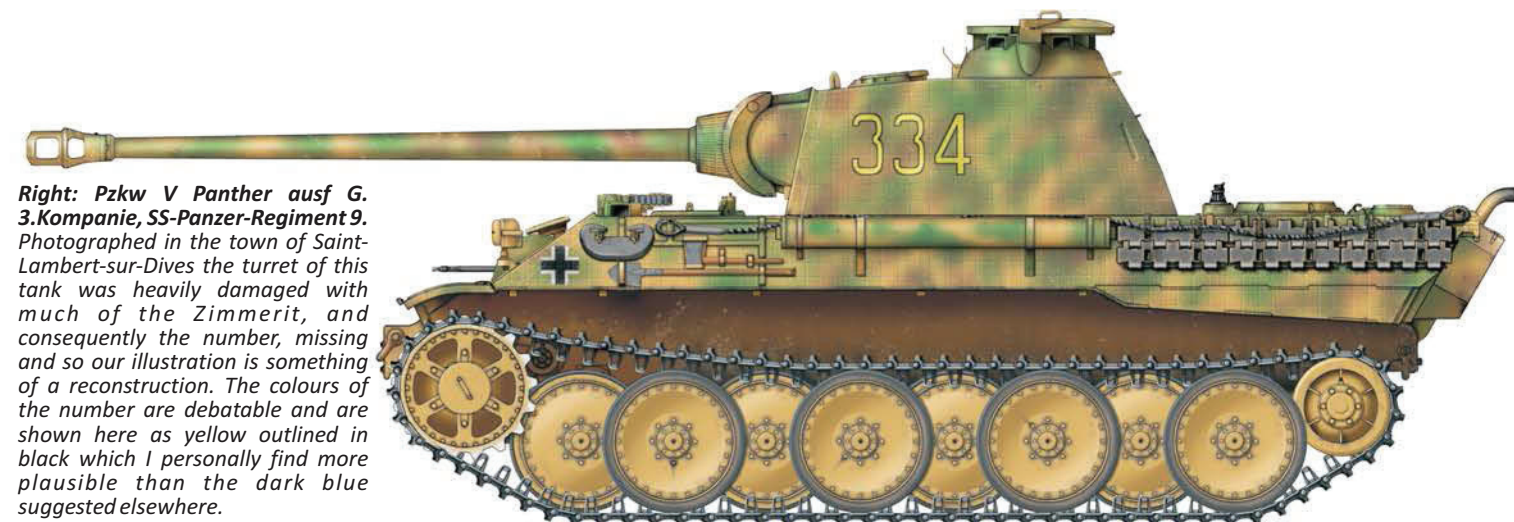


Right: Pzkw V Panther ausf A. SS-Panzer-Regiment 1. Although it is quite certain that this tank is from 1.SS-Panzer-Division the vehicle's number, displayed just behind the gun mantlet, is unfortunately indecipherable in our photograph. The hooks that were welded to the turrets of the battalion's Panthers are visible and what looks to be a large bedroll carried on the turret side was also a common sight on this battalion's tanks. Note that the Sternantenne associated with command tanks is carried in place of the normal radio aerial just behind the turret.



Left: Pzkw V Panther ausf G. 1.Kompanie, SS-Panzer-Regiment 9. Photographed in early August 1944 this vehicle provides a good example of the appearance of the Panther tanks of 9.SS-Panzer-Division Hohenstaufen throughout the Normandy fighting.

Note that the Zimmerit anti-magnetic mine paste has been applied to the turret of Panther 132 in a series of diagonal and horizontal lines. Both this vehicle and the tank depicted below are also shown in the photographs on page 26.



Right: Pzkw V Panther ausf G. 3.Kompanie, SS-Panzer-Regiment 9. Photographed in the town of Saint-Lambert-sur-Dives the turret of this tank was heavily damaged with much of the Zimmerit, and consequently the number, missing and so our illustration is something of a reconstruction. The colours of the number are debatable and are shown here as yellow outlined in black which I personally find more plausible than the dark blue suggested elsewhere.

SELF-PROPELLED ANTI-TANK GUN STRENGTHS - JUNE TO AUGUST, 1944

	June 1944				July 1944				August 1944			
	Marder II	Marder III	JgdPz IV	Jagdpanther	Marder II	Marder III	JgdPz IV	Jagdpanther	Marder II	Marder III	JgdPz IV	Jagdpanther
2.Panzer-Division												
Panzerjäger-Abteilung 38			21									
9.Panzer-Division												
Panzerjäger-Abteilung 50										9	21	
11.Panzer-Division												
Panzerjäger-Abteilung 61									6	2		
116.Panzer-Division												
Panzergrenadier-Regt 60						3						
Panzergrenadier-Regt 156						3						
Panzerjäger-Abteilung 228							21					
130.Panzer-Lehr-Division												
Panzerjäger-Abteilung 130			31									
3.Panzergrenadier-Division												
Panzerjäger-Abteilung 3											31	
schwere-Panzerjäger-Abteilung 654				8				18				
243.Infanterie-Division												
Panzerjäger-Abteilung 243		14										
326.Infanterie-Division												
Panzerjäger-Abteilung 326						14						
331.Infanterie-Division												
Panzerjäger-Abteilung 331										14		
346.Infanterie-Division												
Panzerjäger-Abteilung 346		14										
352.Infanterie-Division												
Panzerjäger-Abteilung 352		14										
353.Infanterie-Division												
Panzerjäger-Abteilung 353		14										
709.Infanterie-Division												
Panzerjäger-Abteilung 709		9										
716.Infanterie-Division												
Panzerjäger-Abteilung 716		10										
9.SS-Panzer-Division												
SS-Panzerjäger-Abteilung 9											21	
10.SS-Panzer-Division												
SS-Panzerjäger-Abteilung 10											21	
12.SS-Panzer-Division												
SS-Panzerjäger-Abteilung 12							10				11	
17.SS-Panzergrenadier-Division												
SS-Panzerjäger-Abteilung 17		12*									21	



US Army infantrymen inspect the wrecks of several German transport vehicles including a Type 166 Schwimmwagen, a Type 82 Kübelwagen and, in the background, an Sdkfz 251 halftrack. This photograph was taken on 12 August 1944 looking south-west towards the Neufbourg railway station which can be seen in the background on Route-de-la-Gare. The village of Neufbourg is situated about 1 kilometre north of Mortain near Abbey Blanche. Although the railway station is no longer in use both buildings seen here and the road have changed little since 1944.

At right: Two Pzkw V Panther ausf A tanks of I.Abteilung, SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 of 1.SS-Panzer-Division photographed on the road between Saint-Barthélemy and Juvigny-le-Tetre north-east of Mortain in August 1944 in the aftermath of Operation Lüttich. The Panthers of this battalion formed part of Kampfgruppe Kuhlmann which was subordinated to 2.Panzer-Division for the attack. The lengths of spare track were attached to the hull sides by sturdy metal hooks which had been welded to the turret roof and overhung the sides. Below: Another view of the tank shown in the background of the photograph at right. The practice of marking the tank's number on the side of the gun mantlet was necessitated by the spare tracks which normally covered the turret sides. The third company number, 328, can be clearly seen here. Further examples of the Panther tanks of this battalion are shown on page 22.



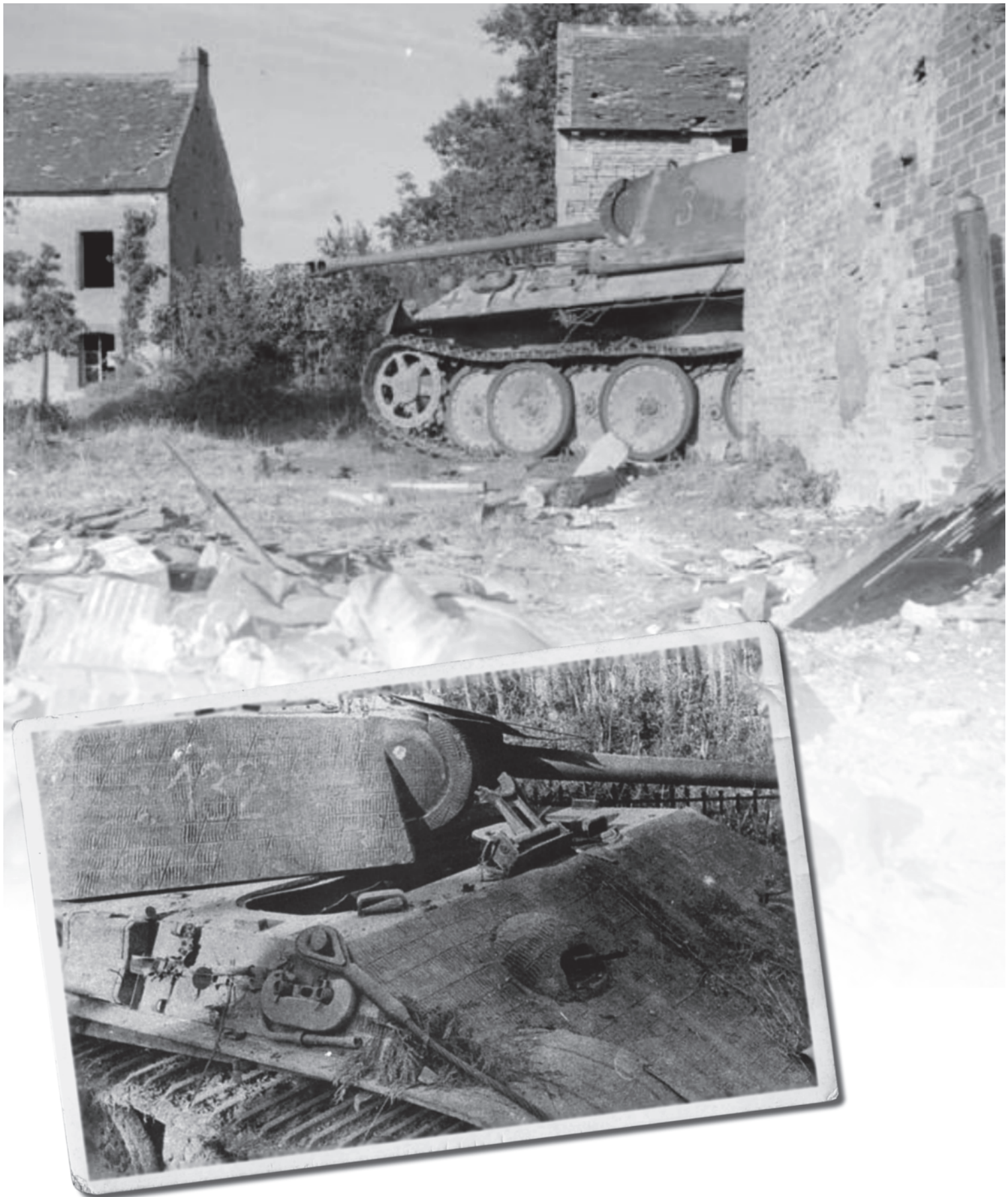
Below: Two Pzkw V Panther ausf A tanks of I.Abteilung, SS-Panzer-Regiment 1. The number 113, denoting a first company vehicle, can be seen on the gun mantlet of the tank nearest the camera and what may be a number 3 is just visible on the turret rear access hatch of the tank in the background. Note also that the latter does not have the hooks on its turret normally associated with Panther tanks of the regiment. This battalion arrived in France with no tanks after fighting on the Eastern Front and was allocated forty-five Panthers in May 1944 with twenty-four coming from Panzer-Regiment 33, another sixteen from Panzer-Regiment 35 and a further five from SS-Panzer-Regiment 3. The battalion did not received any replacement tanks during the Normandy battles and none of the original forty-five survived the campaign.



At right: A Sturmgeschütz III ausf G of SS-Sturmgeschütz-Abteilung 1 photographed earlier in the campaign moving towards the front. The unit insignia of 1.SS-Panzer-Division is just visible of the right hand side fender. The foliage camouflage was a common sight in Normandy were the Allies enjoyed almost complete air superiority. Below: One of the last of the division's assault guns photographed near the bridge over the Orne river at Putanges south of Falaise. The unit insignia of 1.SS-Panzer-Division can also be seen on the front fender of this vehicle nearest the camera. Note that both assault guns depicted here have the so-called waffle pattern of Zimmerit application indicative of vehicles manufactured by Alkett. An assault gun of this battalion is also shown and discussed in the illustration section on page 20.



This division remained in the area south of Caen fighting alongside 12.SS-Panzer-Division as part of 1.SS-Panzerkorps until the evening of 5 August when two battle groups were detached to support 2.Panzer-Division in Operation Lüttich, the Mortain counterattack. The actions of these two groups are discussed further on page 8. By August 12 the division's tank regiment, SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, could muster just thirty tanks and in the fighting later that day around Carrouges, south of Argentan, lost eleven of these irreplaceable vehicles. The following day the regiment had just fourteen Pzkw IV and five Panther tanks available and in three days of fighting managed to reach the River Dives. On 20 August what remained of the regiment broke out of the Falaise Pocket through Saint-Lambert-sur-Dives after losing the last of its tanks.



Top of page: A Pzkw V Panther of 3.Kompanie, SS-Panzer-Regiment 9 photographed in Saint-Lambert-sur-Dives in the aftermath of the battles for the Falaise Pocket. Above: A Pzkw V Panther ausf G of 1.Kompanie, SS-Panzer-Regiment 9 photographed in Saint-Andre-sur-Orne, south of Caen, on 9 August. This tank may have in fact been disabled at some earlier date, possibly at the end of July, but nevertheless gives a good impression of the style of numbering used by this battalion and also a close up view of the method of Zimmerit application. Examples of the tanks of this battalion are also shown on page 22 of the illustration section. When the Allied invasion began this division had been fighting in the East and was rushed to France on 12 June 1944. At that time the Panzer regiment's II.Abteilung had forty-one combat ready Pzkw IV tanks - concentrated in its fifth and sixth companies - and thirty-eight Sturmgeschütz III assault guns with the seventh and eighth companies. The regiment's I.Abteilung was already in France training at Mailly-le-Camp with its new Panther tanks and by 9 June was able to report that seventy-nine vehicles were on hand. The regiment would however receive no replacement tanks while it was in Normandy and further, the division's Panzerjäger-Abteilung remained in Russia. By 18 July the division reported that twenty Pzkw IV and twenty-five Panther tanks and fifteen assault guns were operational. Interestingly, a report of the same day states that a large number of enemy tanks had been captured - eleven of them in running order. By 1 August the division's remaining armored vehicles were formed into a Kampfgruppe led by the commander of the Panzer regiment Obersturmbannführer Otto Meyer. The division remained in the area south of Caen inside the Falaise Pocket until 16 August when it was ordered to withdraw towards Vimoutier via Trun and during this move a number of Meyer's tanks were taken over by 12.SS-Panzer-Division. The few remaining tanks of the division, together with 2.SS-Panzer-Division, were involved in the attempts to relieve the encircled German units from outside the Pocket.



Two examples of Sturmgeschütz IV assault guns of 17.SS-Panzer Grenadier-Division disabled in the fighting which followed the American break out from Saint-Lô - the vehicle shown below photographed near Marigny. In June, this division had forty-two of these assault guns on hand, its full complement, with 17.SS-Panzer-Abteilung. However the battalion was without command vehicles until as late as 12 August when three Panzerbefehlswagen IV tanks arrived, by which time most of the assault guns had been lost. In late July, as a result of Operation Cobra, the division had found itself surrounded at Coutances and only managed to break out after losing most of its equipment. Although parts of the division were withdrawn from the front, some units remained with 2.SS-Panzer-Division for the Mortain counterattack and this is discussed further on page 8. By late August the remnants of the division had been formed into four small Kampfgruppen and placed under the command of 10.SS-Panzer-Division. An assault gun of this battalion is shown on page 15 of the illustration section.





Two photographs of Pzkw V Panther ausf G tanks of I.Abteilung, Panzer-Regiment 24 taken while the battalion was attached to 116.Panzer-Division. The tank at left, number 432 of 4.Kompanie, shows the style of camouflage common to many tanks of this battalion where large diagonal stripes of Rotbraun and Olivegrün have been painted over the Dunkelgelb base coat. As most available photographs of this battalion's tanks depict vehicles which have either been damaged or are in a very worn state, this pattern may have been more common than previously thought - if not universal. The practice of hanging spare lengths of track from the turret sides and attaching a spare wheel towards the rear of the turret is also indicative of the Panther tanks of this battalion. In another photograph of the vehicle shown below, the number 411 is clearly visible. Further examples of this battalion's tanks and an explanation of their markings can be found on page 33. At far left is an example of the semi-official Tradition Badge worn by members of 116.Panzer-Division.

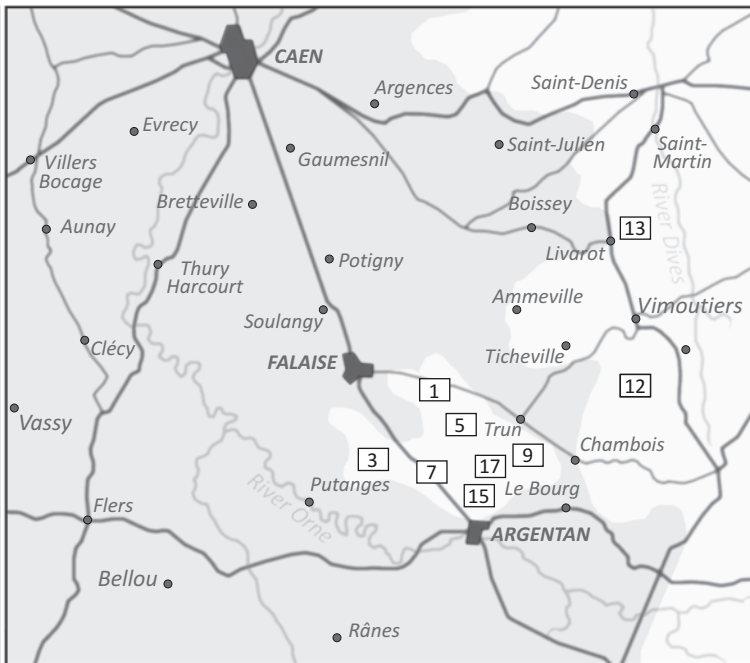
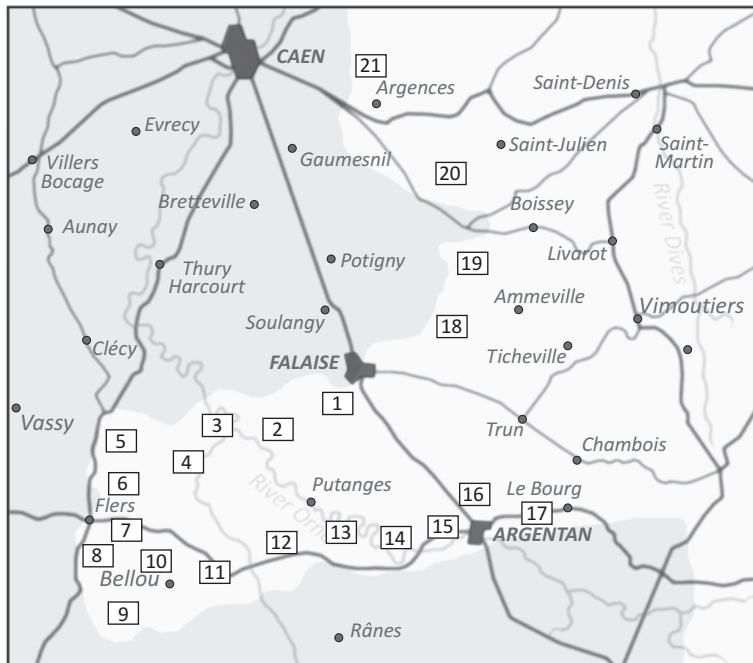


In late June the division's Panzerjäger-Abteilung 228 received its full allocation of twenty-one Jagdpanzer IV tank destroyers - an example of which is shown at left. This battalion was commanded by Major Helmut Bochnig and was made up of a staff platoon, two companies of tank destroyers and a further company equipped with towed Pak 40 anti-tank guns. However, at least one authoritative source states that the division had six self-propelled guns that were carried outside the division's authorised establishment. Although there has been some speculation that these vehicles were Sturmgeschütz III assault guns it seems likely that, as the battalion was formed in part by Reserve-Panzerjäger-Abteilung 9, they were in fact three Marder 7.5cm and three Marder 7.62cm self-propelled anti-tank guns. Whether these were still on hand by the time of the Mortain counterattack cannot be ascertained with any certainty.



Sturmgeschütz III auf G assault guns of Panzerjäger-Abteilung 243 photographed here being recovered and repaired by US Army units. This battalion was attached to 243. Infanterie-Division which had been stationed in the Contentin Peninsula when the invasion began. The division's Panzerjäger battalion, commanded by Oberleutnant Franz Stratmann, was made up of three companies with the first company being equipped with fourteen Marder III 7.5cm tank destroyers, the second company with ten Sturmgeschütz III assault guns and the third company fielding a number of 2cm Flak guns - both self-propelled and towed. The second, assault gun, company was referred to as Sturmgeschütz-Abteilung 1243. The division was increasingly involved in heavy fighting and by 23 July, the number of assault guns had been reduced to three. Plans to rebuild the division were eventually shelved in September and the remaining personnel were used to form Panzerjäger-Abteilung 1176. Examples of this battalion's assault guns are also shown on page 15 of the illustration section.





THE TRAP AT FALAISE

The development of the Falaise Pocket, the darker areas are those controlled by the Allied armies. The map at left depicts the situation at noon on 17 August, the day Feldmarschall von Kluge was relieved of the command of both Oberbefehlshaber West and Heeresgruppe B. At right can be seen the territory held by the Allies on 21 August when the gap was finally closed for the last time. Numbers indicate the approximate positions of the following divisions. 1) 12.SS-Pz-Div. 2) 271.Inf-Div. 3) 277.Inf-Div. 4) 276.Inf-Div. 5) 3.Fallschirm-Div. 6) 21.Pz-Div. 7) 326.Inf-Div. 8) 84.Inf-Div. 9) 10.SS-Pz-Div. 10) 363.Inf-Div. 11) 708.Inf-Div. 12) 2.SS-Pz-Div. 13) 9.SS-Pz-Div. 14) 1.SS-Pz-Div. 15) 2.Pz-Div. 16) 9.Pz-Div. 17) 116.Pz-Div. 18) 89.Inf-Div. 19) 85.Inf-Div. 20) 272.Inf-Div. 21) 346.Inf-Div. It should be noted that the locations have been taken from the best available evidence, however given the chaotic nature of the situation it is entirely possible that some errors may have been made. Also, most of these units would be by this time divisions in name only.

Operation Lüttich had gained nothing for the Germans. By the evening of the first day, the attack by the Kampfgruppen which made up XXXXVII. Panzerkorps had been halted and in the following days they would be driven back past their starting points. The operation had in fact been counterproductive, effectively destroying one of Kluge's last armoured reserves.

During the early hours of Tuesday, 8 August - just two days after the counterattack began - the British and Canadian forces around Caen launched a major offensive codenamed Totalise, aimed at the high ground north of the town of Falaise. Holding a front of almost 14 kilometres were elements of 12.SS-Panzer-Division Hitler Jugend commanded by Oberführer Kurt Meyer who on the previous day had been ordered to join the German units still fighting around Mortain. As Meyer's men were preparing to move off the preliminary Allied aerial bombardment began to fall on the positions of the nearby 89. Infanterie-Division. Realising that a major attack was imminent Meyer, on his own initiative, countermanded the movement order and directed Sturmabführer Max Wünsche to move his battle group(1) to Potigny where they were able to cover the Caen-Falaise road.

Despite the massive preparatory bombardment and the employment of specially converted personnel carriers, the British and Canadians, in two days of desperate fighting, were able to progress less than halfway to their objective down the Route de Falaise before the advance began to stall.

On 10 August, in one great push, the Canadians reached the high ground north of the town but were unable to go any further. The following morning, the Canadian corps commander replaced his armoured divisions with infantry formations, effectively ending the offensive. Once again, the Germans had been able to scrape together enough men and tanks to hold their line.

Although Operation Totalise had fallen short of its main objective, it had made clear the probability that 7.Armee would eventually be encircled by the Americans steadily approaching from the south and the pressure from the British in the north which must, in the long run, succeed. Indeed, on the assumption that Kluge would withdraw his men to the east, the British commander Montgomery - supported by Patton the US 3rd Army commander - now suggested that his forces turn left and strike towards the Seine while the Americans block the escape route through the Loire valley. They were both overruled by Eisenhower who sided with General Bradley in adopting a limited operation aimed at the area around Argentan, some 30 kilometres south of Falaise. Unknown to all of them, Hitler - despite the strongest urgings from Kluge - was refusing to allow a single unit to be withdrawn. To compound his intransigence Hitler persisted in viewing the British as the main threat and took no interest at all in the operations of the US Army which had kicked Hauser's 7.Armee out of its headquarters at Le Mans and pinned down the tanks of 9.Panzer-Division in the south.

When the American offensive resumed, their 3rd Army was able to reach Alençon by 12 August and despite a German counter thrust by the tanks of Panzergruppe Eberbach(2), found themselves on the outskirts of Argentan by the following day - an advance of over 40 kilometres. However, the next morning - while poised to take the town - they were ordered to withdraw. Astounded, the local commander was advised that as the British were

advancing from the north, the withdrawal would ensure that no 'friendly fire' incidents occurred. Controversy still rages over the identity of the author of this bizarre explanation with at least one respected source suggesting that it originated with Montgomery. In any event, a large gap now existed which presented the Germans with the opportunity of escape.

On the morning of 14 August a new offensive codenamed Tractable went ahead with parts of Canadian 1st Army and the Polish 1st Armoured Division. Unlike Operation Totalise this assault would take place in daylight, a dense smoke screen would hopefully blind the defenders. The intention was to take Falaise by midnight of the first day and then move on to Trun. From there an advance to nearby Chambois would enable a link up with the Americans. Once again, 12.SS-Panzer-Division with a number of infantry formations(3) would be called upon to hold the German line.

In an incredible stroke of luck, a Canadian officer carrying a complete set of plans for the operation drove into the German lines only hours before the offensive was about to begin. Forewarned, Meyer was able to make the most of his meager resources and placed his remaining tanks and infantry, supported by twelve 8.8 cm Pak 43 anti-tank guns, along the Caen-Falaise road hoping to intercept the main Canadian drive.

At noon hundreds of RAF bombers pounded the front and from behind a smoke screen laid down by their artillery, the two Canadian divisions moved forward. Although the smoke severely hampered the German gunners they were still able to inflict severe casualties on the Allied tank units, killing the armoured brigade commander, as they struggled south towards Falaise.

Throughout the remainder of the day the Allied attacks continued and despite a counterattack by the Tigers of 2.Kompanie, schwere-SS-Panzer-Abteilung 102(4) - by late in the afternoon the Poles were in Potigny, about 7 kilometres north of Falaise. When darkness fell elements of two Canadian infantry divisions had reached the high ground north of Falaise but despite their best efforts had been unable to break into the town. Although the first day had not gone as well as expected, the Allies were optimistic and during the night the Canadians moved another infantry division into the line.

Early on 15 August, both the Canadian and Polish armoured divisions resumed their drive south-east towards the town of Falaise while on the left flank the two infantry divisions pushed south. At the end of the day's fighting the Canadian tanks were in Soulangy but Falaise still held out and Trun, to the east, had also not been taken. However, on the following day elements of the Canadian 2nd Infantry Division broke into Falaise and although it would take two days to completely secure the town, now only defended by scattered groups of German soldiers, the Canadians could regroup their forces for a final push to capture Trun, link up with the Americans and close the ever narrowing escape corridor.

As the Canadian infantry had been fighting their way into Falaise on 16 August, Hitler was demanding that Kluge mount another counterattack. Pleading that any offensive action was quite impossible and that the best part of the German army in the west was about to be encircled, Kluge at last persuaded Hitler that a general withdrawal was the only option and late that afternoon Hitler relented. Any relief the Feldmarschall may have experienced however

was only temporary as the next day Hitler sacked him and had him recalled to Germany(5). Convinced that he was about face execution and dishonour, Kluge took poison on a stopover in Metz. His replacement would be Feldmarshall Walter Model, who Hitler awarded with the Diamonds to his Knight's Cross with Oakleaves and Swords on the very day Kluge killed himself. Renowned for his skill in conducting defensive operations and greatly admired by Hitler, Model was given almost a free hand and his first order was that 7.Armee and Panzergruppe Eberbach should retreat immediately through the 20 kilometre wide gap that was still open on the afternoon of 17 August. To hold the corridor open, II.SS-Panzerkorps would face the British and Canadians on the northern edge while on the southern front XXXVII.Panzerkorps, which had already been badly battered at Mortain, would hold the Americans.

On 18 August, the Polish division - which had been split into three battlegroups - began a sweeping manoeuvre far to the south-east with the intention of linking up with the Americans who were now at Argentan. The Canadians had also maintained the momentum of their advance having taken Trun on the same day. By 19 August the Poles had reached the outskirts of Chambois and reinforced by an armoured brigade captured the town by nightfall. That same evening they established contact with the units of the US 3rd Army. During the day however a Kampfgruppe of 2.Panzer-Division had managed to break through the Canadian front at Saint-Lambert-sur-Dives, almost exactly between Trun and Chambois, keeping the road open for six hours until just before sunset and allowing a large number of German troops to escape. Although small parties managed to infiltrate the Canadian lines during the night and cross the River Dives to safety, the gap was now - for the time being - effectively closed.

On the morning of 20 August, Model ordered the remaining tanks of 2.SS-Panzer-Division(6) and 9.SS-Panzer-Division to attack from outside the pocket towards the Polish positions on the high ground above the village of Coudehard, about 8 kilometres east of Trun, referred to as Mount Ormel. By noon another battle group made up of elements from 10.SS-Panzer-Division, 12.SS-Panzer-Division and 116.Panzer-Division broke through the Polish front, once again opening the gap, while 9.SS-Panzer-Division prevented the Canadians from assisting the Poles. Within a few hours approximately ten thousand Germans were able to escape.

The Mount Ormel position while penetrated had not been overrun and in a rare loss of control Hausser, the 7.Armee commander, exasperated by the artillery fire being directed onto his men by the Poles, ordered that they be 'eliminated'. Scraping together the remnants of 2.SS-Panzer-Division and 352.Infanterie-Division he threw them at the Poles inflicting such damage that they could only watch as the survivors of XXXVII.Panzerkorps fled through the gap. Exhausted, both sides chose not to continue the fight after nightfall although sporadic artillery fire continued to harass the retreating Germans.

On the following morning, at 11.00am, a final attempt was made to capture Mount Ormel which was only narrowly defeated and just after noon the Canadians managed to reinforce the Polish units defending the hill. That afternoon the survivors of the Das Reich and Hohenstaufen divisions were ordered to retreat towards the Seine.

By evening of the following day, Monday 21 August, the Canadian armoured division had reached the Polish forces at Coudehard, while two Canadian

infantry divisions had taken Saint-Lambert-sur-Dives and secured the area north of Chambois. The Falaise Pocket had finally been sealed.

The German losses in this battle that ended the Normandy campaign were horrendous and there are no definitive estimates of casualties with figures ranging from 10-15,000 men killed and 40-50,000 missing or taken prisoner. Some formations were almost totally destroyed in the fighting such as 12.SS-Panzer-Division which lost almost all its armoured vehicles and artillery as well as over three-quarters of its transport. By the end of the Normandy battles the division could only muster three hundred men and ten tanks. And although the efforts of their comrades had allowed thousands of German troops to escape, what little heavy equipment they managed to save was for the most part lost in the Seine crossings.

(1) Wünsche had been the commander of SS-Panzer-Regiment 12 of Meyer's division when the invasion began. On the evening of 7 August, when Totalise commenced, the Kampfgruppe which bore his name consisted of the regimental and first battalion staffs of SS-Panzer-Regiment 12, the regiment's third and eighth companies equipped with Panther and Pzkw IV tanks respectively, the second company of schwere-SS-Panzer-Abteilung 101 and the under-strength first and second battalions of SS-Panzerregrenadier-Regiment 26. Meyer also had at his disposal Kampfgruppe Waldmüller - commanded by Sturmabführer Hans Waldmüller - consisting of parts of II.Abteilung, SS-Panzer-Regiment 12 and 1.Kompanie, SS-Panzerjäger-Abteilung 12.

(2) Commanded by General Heinrich Eberbach this was an ad hoc formation comprised of staff and support elements of LXXXI.Armeekorps, XXXVII.Panzerkorps, 116.Panzer-Division (minus most of its tanks and reconnaissance battalion), parts of 1.SS-Panzer-Division and 2.Panzer-Division, the second battalion of Panzer-Regiment 33 of 9.Panzer-Division, remnants of 276, 277 and 346.Infanterie-Divisionen, Luftwaffen-Feld-Division 16 and Werfer-Brigaden 8 and 9.

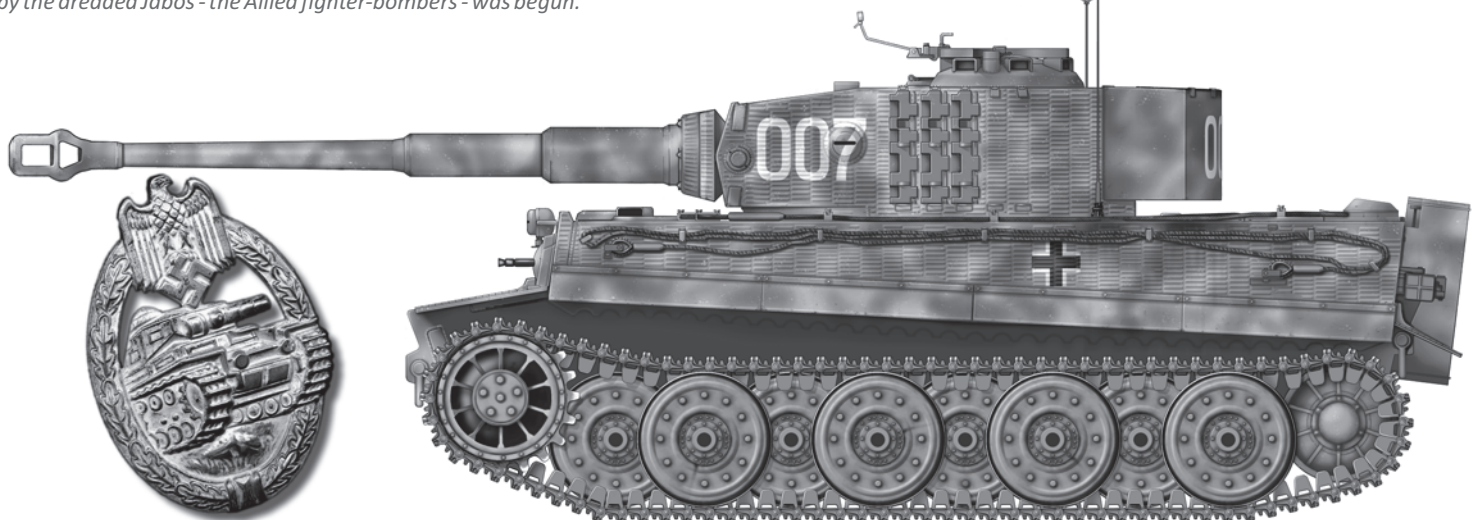
(3) All the infantry divisions supporting Meyer's unit - 271, 272 and 85 - were badly under strength and only parts of 89.Infanterie-Division would take part in the battle. In fact, Allied intelligence was only able to identify two distinct divisions.

(4) On 14 August this company, which had been continually engaged since 9 July, had only three operational tanks available numbered 212, 231 and 241. Later that day during an attack near Soulangy Tiger 231, commanded by Untersturmführer Loritz, was lost and towards evening Tiger 212 of Untersturmführer Münster was destroyed by Canadian infantrymen. On the following day the remaining vehicle, Tiger 241 commanded by Untersturmführer Martin Schroif, was joined by the tanks of 1.Kompanie and was involved in the fighting around Potigny.

(5) Hitler had been unable to contact Kluge for some hours during the morning of 17 August and immediately assumed that he was conspiring to surrender his entire command to the Allies. Informed of Kluge's death, Hitler dismissed the news with the comment '...he probably would have been arrested anyway'.

(6) By this time as few as ten tanks of SS-Panzer-Regiment 2 supported by the remnants of the third battalion of the Der Führer regiment, the remaining assault guns and parts of the division's reconnaissance battalion.

Amid all the destruction one death, for the German's at least, would stand out from all the rest. On 8 August, in a field north-east of Gaumesnil, Hauptsturmführer Michael Wittmann led six Tiger tanks of 2.Kompanie, schwere-SS-Panzer-Abteilung 101 northwards towards Saint-Aignan-de-Cramesnil, just 10 kilometers south of Caen, where he expected to find the lead elements of the 1st Polish Armoured Division. Having served with the Leibstandarte-SS Adolf Hitler since the first day of the war, Wittmann was already something of a celebrity when his badly depleted company of just three Tigers managed to inflict a severe defeat on units of the British 7th Armoured Division at Villers-Bocage on 13 June. On 10 July the battalion commander, Obersturmbannführer Heinz Von Westerhagen, was relieved for medical reasons and replaced by Wittman who took over the commander's tank, numbered 007, shown here. Now, as the German tanks approached Gaumesnil, moving parallel to the Falaise-Caen road, they failed to notice a troop of British Sherman tanks that had taken cover in a nearby wood and which now opened a devastating fire. Positioned at the rear of the German formation Wittmann's Tiger was hit by two rounds that slammed into the side of his Tiger near the fuel tank causing an explosion of such force that the turret was lifted from the hull. Within seconds the tank's ammunition exploded blowing the turret completely clear of the vehicle and ripping off both tracks. Of the other six tanks, five were knocked out and the last abandoned. Such was Wittmann's fame in Germany that the authorities felt unable to admit for some time that he was in fact dead and reported - even to his wife - that he was merely missing. The notion that an enemy tank had accounted for Wittmann could of course not be tolerated and the myth that his tank had been destroyed by the dreaded Jabos - the Allied fighter-bombers - was begun.

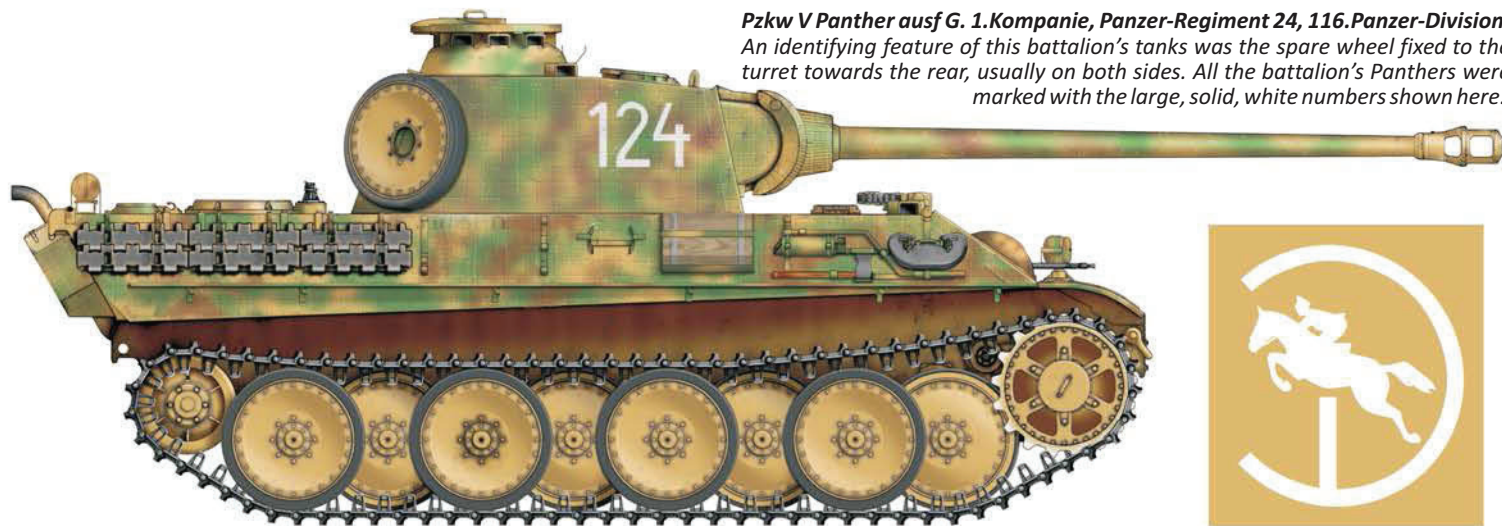


Photographed on the east bank of the Seine in August 1944, this Tiger I of 2.Kompanie, schwere-Panzer-Abteilung 503 is one of the few tanks of this battalion to survive the fighting. In June 1944 this unit had been described as 'the best and most experienced Tiger battalion in the German army' and by 10 July all three companies had arrived in Normandy. At the end of July, 3.Kompanie was withdrawn to the Mailly-le-Camp training area south of Reims in order to be re-equipped with the Tiger II, the later version with the so-called Henschel turret, handing over to 2.Kompanie all their remaining vehicles. Below, inset: Although some sources state that 3.Kompanie was withdrawn after being almost completely destroyed on 18 July in the bombing that preceded Operation Goodwood, in fact only two tanks were lost, one of which - number 313 - is shown here.



Photographed on the railway line at Braine between Soisson and Reims, well to the east of Paris, these four tanks of schwere-Panzer-Abteilung 503 were captured when the train was stopped on the morning of 29 August by elements of the US 32nd Armored Regiment. Several photographs of this incident are known to exist and although all seem to indicate that these tanks carried no markings, it is however probable that these vehicles are the survivors of 2.Kompanie which took over all the third company Tiger I tanks at the end of July. The battalion's first company had been equipped with Tiger II vehicles in June.





Pzkw V Panther ausf G. 1.Kompanie, Panzer-Regiment 24, 116.Panzer-Division. An identifying feature of this battalion's tanks was the spare wheel fixed to the turret towards the rear, usually on both sides. All the battalion's Panthers were marked with the large, solid, white numbers shown here.

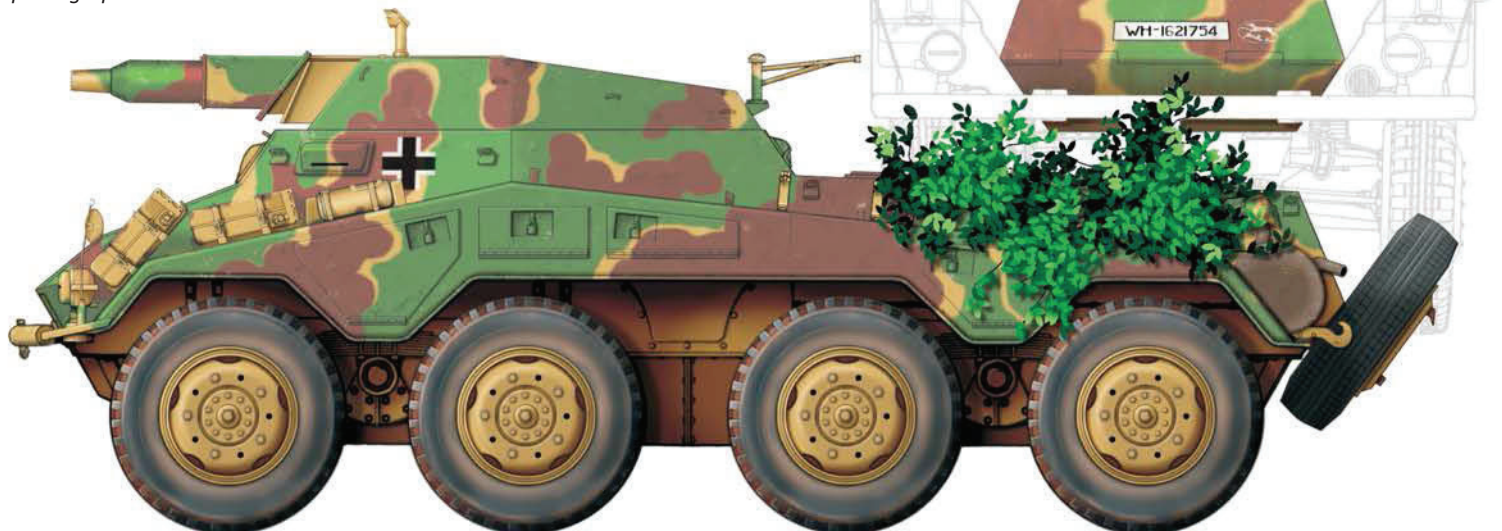


Pzkw V Panther ausf G. 4.Kompanie, Panzer-Regiment 24, 116.Panzer-Division. The division's original Panther battalion was still in training when the Normandy campaign began and I.Abteilung of Panzer-Regiment 24 was temporarily attached to the division although the tanks continued to carry the unit insignia of their parent formation, 24.Panzer-Division - shown in an enlarged view above. The marking was usually displayed on the right side stowage box at the rear as shown here and sometimes at the hull front.

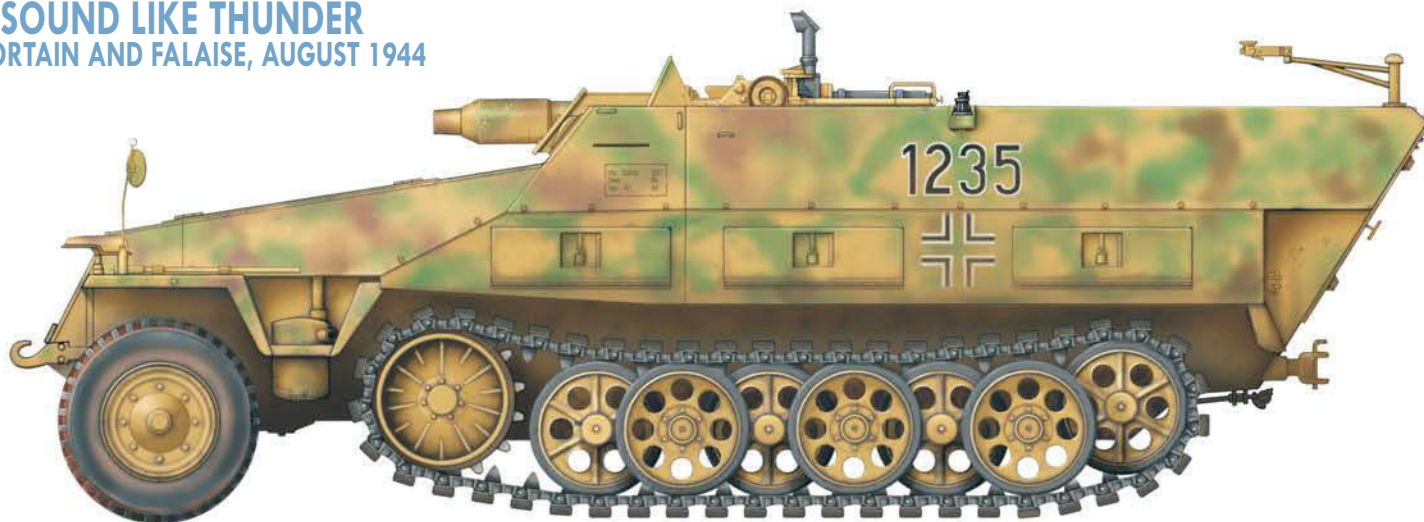


Above: In addition to the unit insignia of 24.Panzer-Division a system of marking was employed where a light coloured, probably white, circle or bar was painted onto the turret rear access door. The significance of this is not understood at present. Note also the fuel cans.

Below and right: Sdkfz 234/3. Panzer-Aufklärungs-Abteilung 116, 116.Panzer-Division. Photographed near Occagnes, a small village located about 7 kilometres north-west of Argentan, at the conclusion of the fighting for the Falaise Pocket in August 1944, this armoured car was captured intact except for a bent front fender. Only eighty-eight of these vehicles were built between June and December 1944 and the division's reconnaissance battalion is reported to have operated a number within its headquarters and 4.Kompanie - although the latter may in fact never have received their allocation, some authoritative sources stating that the division had only two on hand at any time. The front view shows the placement of the division's unit insignia and it should be noted that the registration number is completely speculative being indecipherable in the photograph on which this illustration is based.



A SOUND LIKE THUNDER MORTAIN AND FALAISE, AUGUST 1944



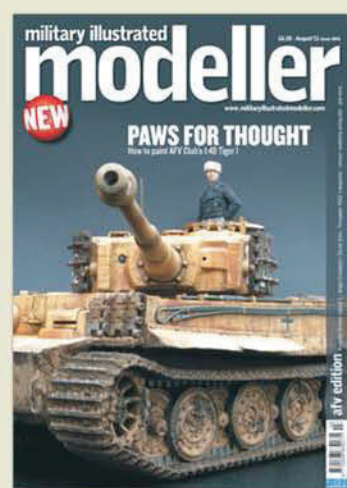
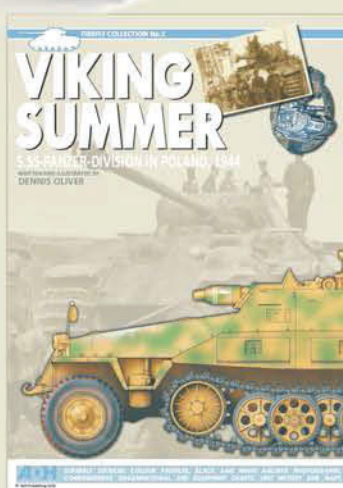
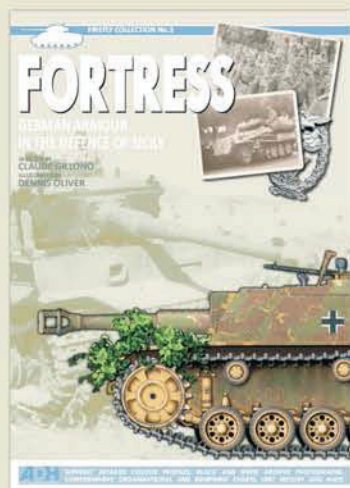
At left: An Sdkfz 234/2 armoured car of 2.Panzer-Division. This vehicle is also shown in the illustration section on page 16.



Top: An Sdkfz 251/9 ausf D of 2.SS-Panzer-Division, possibly SS-Panzer Grenadier-Regiment 4 Der Führer. The four digit number and the unusual Balkenkreuz insignia are both indicative of this division. At right: A beautifully constructed and painted 1/35 scale model Pzkw IV ausf H of SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 built by Lim Kian Guan and reproduced here courtesy of Bernard Cher and M Workshop, Singapore.



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